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ABSTRACT

Developed for secondary students to place political situations in context, this document uses essays, interviews, songs, literature, and prose to present the culture of Haiti and the history of colonialism, neo-colonialism, and struggles for independence. After a historical overview, a chronology provides key dates in Haitian history. Maps of Haiti and the Caribbean precede two folktales that blend African and European folklore to become part of the cultural heritage of the Haitian people. The tradition of work exchange by the rural Haitians originating from West African roots is explained and illustrated by a story. After describing voodoo and its development as a resistance force in Haiti, data on conditions in Haiti provide statistics on such topics as population trends, life expectancy, illiteracy rate, and infant mortality rate. Six stories illustrate Haitian daily life. Music plays an integral role in the social and religious activities, and four songs and discussion questions provide opportunities for student participation. Seven teaching ideas provide further information on activities. A list of 12 organizations and journals and 26 sources (including videos) for further information on Haiti concludes the guide. (CK)

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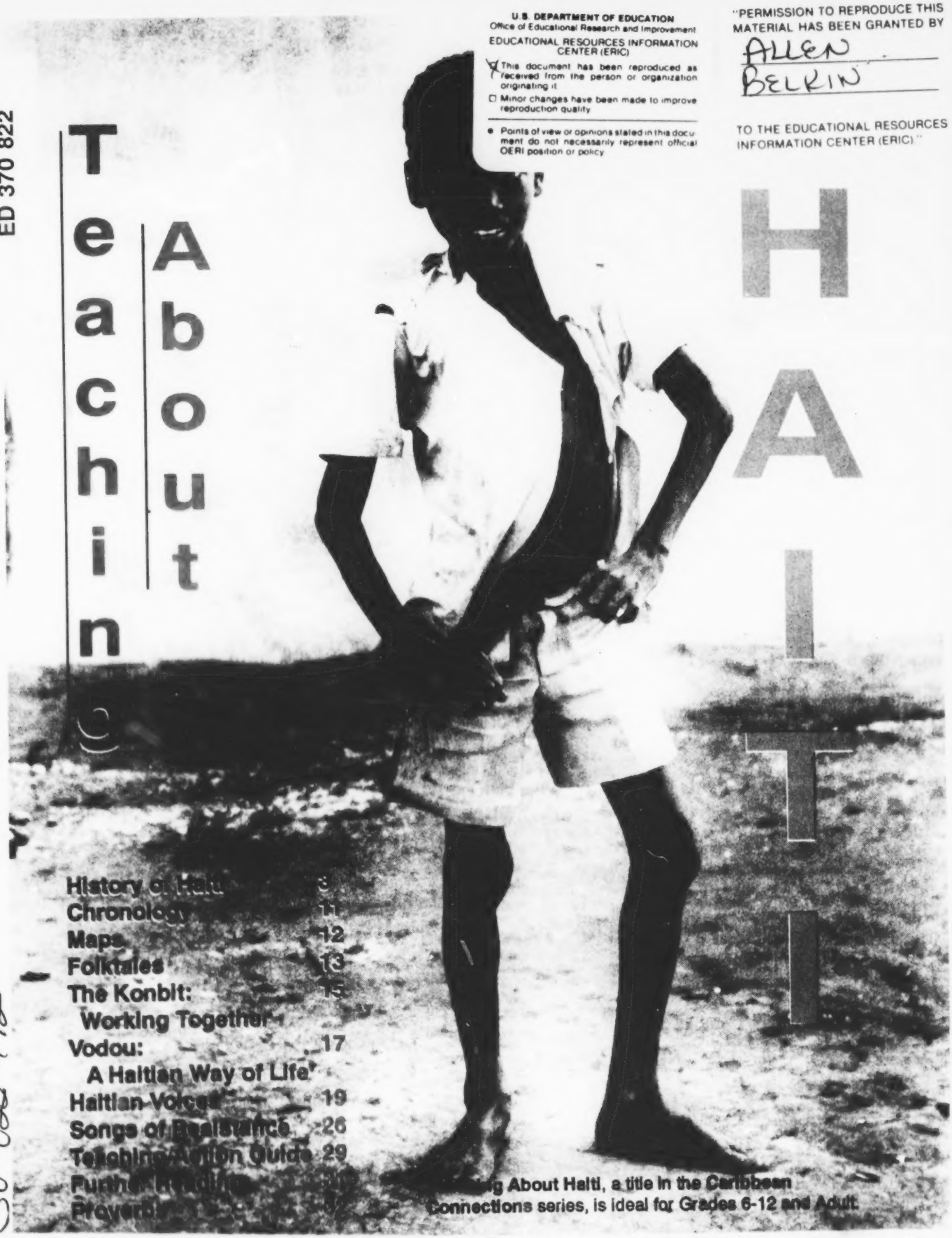
Teaching About HAITI



History of Haiti 3
Chronology 11
Maps 12
Folktales 13
The Konbit: Working Together 15
Vodou: A Haitian Way of Life 17
Haitian Voices 19
Songs of Resistance 26
Teaching/Action Guide 29
Further Reading
Proverbs

Teaching About Haiti, a title in the Caribbean Connections series, is ideal for Grades 6-12 and Adult.

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Teaching About Haiti

In the last few months, Haitian refugees have frequently been a lead news story. But the media seldom provides enough background to help students develop an educated opinion about the roots of this crisis.

Teaching About Haiti was developed to give secondary school students the information they need to place the current political situation in context. Haiti's history and culture are presented through essays, interviews, songs, literature and prose.

This publication is an introduction to Haiti. On the inside back cover, we have recommended books and videos to further your study of Haiti, the first Black republic in the Americas.

As the Haitian literacy primer says, "Reading and writing are only one step toward knowledge." What's the next step? Listen to Haitian music. Invite a speaker to your classroom. Write letters to the editor about what you have learned about Haiti. Organize a presentation during Black History Month. Get involved in the national campaign to restore democracy to Haiti. Visit Haiti. And more.

The editors welcome feedback from teachers and students who have used this publication. Which sections proved most effective? What should be modified, deleted or added to future editions? Please contact us at the NECA address below.

Knowing how to read and write is one step toward knowledge.
From the *Goute Sèl/Taste of Salt* Mission Alpha Literacy Primer, 1986.

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Cover photo of young boy at the Missionary Brothers of Charity Home for Young Boys, Cité Soleil. Courtesy of **Mev Puleo**/Impact Visuals, © 1992.

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Additional copies of **Teaching About Haiti** can be requested from NECA, 1118 22nd Street, NW, Washington, DC 20037, (202) 429-0137 at minimal cost. Call for prices.

Additional information on the **Haiti Solidarity Week Campaign** available from: **The Quixote Center**, PO Box 5206, Hyattsville, MD 20782, (301) 699-0042.

Order an organizing packet on Haiti and other materials from: **Clergy and Laity Concerned**, 340 Mead Road, Decatur, GA 30030, (404) 377-1983.

Haiti in History

Once a land in which all its inhabitants were well-fed, Haiti is now the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. One out of five children die before the age of five. Life expectancy is 54 years. Human rights abuses against those who criticize the government are unimaginably cruel. Why are people suffering? How are the people of Haiti trying to change these conditions? How can we help? Haiti's history of colonialism, neo-colonialism and the struggles for independence can help you to explore these questions.

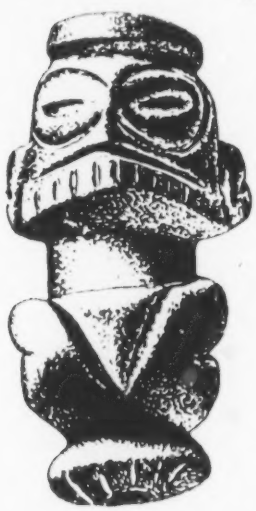
Haiti and its next-door neighbor, the Dominican Republic, share the second-largest island in the Caribbean. Before the arrival of the Europeans, the island was a homeland of the Taíno Arawak, a native people originally from South America. They called it Ayiti, or "mountainous land."

The Taínos

Ayiti, also called Quisqueya, was a center of Taíno Arawak culture in the Caribbean. It was divided into five main *cacicasgos* or kinship nations. The Taínos lived in small villages along coastal areas and river deltas. Each village was governed by a *cacique*, or chief, who could be a man or woman.

The Taínos' food came from hunting, fishing and agriculture, and the population was well-fed. Everyone in the society worked, even the *caciques*. Cooperation and sharing were basic to the Taínos' way of life. Each village had a central plaza called a *batey*, used for festivals, ball games, and religious ceremonies.

If you had visited Ayiti just prior to the Spanish conquest, you would have seen a lush and fertile land. The island was covered with forests teeming with plant and animal life. There were so many birds that flocks flying overhead would darken the sun.



The Arawak carved figures in human and animal shapes from stone, shell, wood, gold and other materials. The figures, called cemís, were used to drive away evil spirits and ensure a good harvest.

The Conquest

Columbus landed on Ayiti in 1492 and claimed the island for Spain. He renamed it *La Isla Española* (Hispaniola). It became the first Spanish settlement in the Americas.

Columbus and his sailors hoped to profit from their "discovery." They mistakenly believed gold could be found in abundance on the island. The settlers forced the Taínos to labor in unproductive gold mines, and massacred them when they tried to resist. The persecution of the Taínos was cruel in the extreme. A Spanish priest who accompanied Columbus, Bartolomé de las Casas, reported that "the conquistadors would test their swords and manly strength on captured Indians and place bets on the slicing off of heads or the cutting of bodies in half with one blow."

After initially welcoming the visitors, the Taíno tried bravely to defend themselves. There were many battles in which the Taíno routed the Spanish, but European cannons, steel swords, horses and dogs finally overwhelmed the Taíno resistance. Diseases like smallpox also killed many of the native people. Within 50 years of Columbus' arrival, the Taíno Arawak population of Hispaniola had been virtually destroyed.

The Africans

To replace the Taínos' labor, the Spanish began bringing in Africans to work as slaves. But Hispaniola, it turned out, had little gold, and most of the Spanish eventually moved on to search for riches in Mexico and Peru.

Spanish neglect of Hispaniola opened the way for French and British pirates who used the western part of the island as a base. Eventually, per-

manent French settlements were established. Spain ceded the western third of Hispaniola to France in 1697. France called its new colony St. Domingue.

The French imported at least half a million Africans to work on sugar, coffee, cotton and indigo plantations. Under French rule, St. Domingue became the most valuable colony in the Caribbean, producing more sugar than all the British Caribbean islands put together. This wealth was based on brutal slavery, administered by corrupt French military officials. Many Africans died after only a few years in St. Domingue; they were quickly replaced by new arrivals.

The Haitian Revolution

After nearly a century of suffering, in 1791, the slaves on St. Domingue rose up in rebellion. Unlike slave revolts elsewhere, the St. Domingue slaves successfully overthrew their masters and the entire slave system. They won the colony's independence from France and established the world's first independent Black republic, Haiti.

Several factors contributed to the slaves' success. Most important were the unity and rebellious spirit of the St. Domingue slaves themselves. This was linked in part to Vodou, based on African religious beliefs, which bonded slaves of different ethnic backgrounds together (See Vodou: A Haitian Way of Life). Second, the French Revolution of 1789 upset the balance of power in France's colonies and triggered slave rebellions all over the Caribbean.

> "The slaves destroyed [the plantations] tirelessly. Like the peasants in the Jacquirie or the Ludite wreckers, they were seeking their salvation in the most obvious way, the destruction of what they knew was the cause of their suffering; and they had suffered much. They knew that as long as these plantations stood, their lot would be to labour on them until they dropped. From their masters they had known rape, torture, degradation, and, at the slightest provocation, death. They returned in kind... Now that they held power, they did as they had been taught.
>
> And yet they were surprisingly moderate... They did not maintain this revengeful spirit for long. The cruelties of property and privilege are always more ferocious than the revenges of poverty and oppression. For the one aims at perpetuating resented injustice, the other is merely a momentary passion soon appeased... in all the records of that time there is no single instance of such fiendish torture as burying white men up to the neck and smearing the holes in their face to attract insects, or blowing them up with gun powder, or any of the thousand and one bestialities to which they had been subjected..."
>
> From: James, C.L.R. *The Black Jacobins.*

Toussaint Louverture, 1743-1803

The leadership of Toussaint Louverture was a third critical factor. A former slave, Toussaint was a brilliant military and political strategist. Under his leadership, the slaves defeated Spanish and British invasions and forced France to abolish slavery.

Napoleon Bonaparte's French troops finally captured Toussaint and exiled him to France, where he died. But the army of former slaves, led by the Black general Jean-Jacques Dessalines, went on to defeat the French forces. On January 1, 1804, Dessalines declared independence. The new state was baptized Haiti, from the Arawak name for the island.

The Two Worlds of Haiti

The Western, slave-holding powers viewed the Haitian Revolution as a dangerous example of slave revolt. They isolated the new Black republic, cutting off trade and refusing diplomatic recognition. France recognized Haiti in 1838 in exchange for a large payment which placed Haiti heavily in debt. The United States did not recognize Haiti until 1862, after the slave-holding states seceded from the Union.

This isolation had some positive effects: it allowed a vibrant and original Haitian culture to develop and flourish. During this period, Haitian Creole (or *Kreyol*) emerged as a language in its own right, drawing elements from French and from African

languages.

On the other hand, Haiti's ten years of war, followed by its political isolation, concentrated power in the hands of the Haitian military. Many of the Haitian presidents who followed Dessalines were generals of the slave army. Their rule was dictatorial and often corrupt.

French colonial rule had divided the population by race, and these divisions persisted. Few whites were left in the country after the revolution. But rivalry continued between Black Haitians and those of mixed race, known as mulattoes. Many mulattoes had owned property before the revolution, and they remained a privileged class. But now, Black officers from Toussaint's army competed for power and wealth.

The most important division, however, was not between Blacks and mulattoes. It was between a tiny, privileged minority (which included Haitians of both races) and the majority of the population, the former slaves. The elite group lived in the towns, especially the capital, Port-au-Prince. It controlled the government, the military, and commerce. The majority of Haitians lived in the countryside, farming small plots of land. They grew coffee for export, and crops such as corn, beans and yams to eat. These farmers paid taxes which went into the pockets of government officials. But the government did almost nothing to help the rural areas, which lacked roads, schools, electricity or running water.

These two worlds of Haiti—the towns and the countryside—were culturally separate as well. Town-dwellers used the French language for the affairs of government and commerce. But most rural people spoke Haitian Creole. They were shut out of the political process, which was carried out in a language they did not speak.

Town people often tried to imitate a European lifestyle. In the countryside, by contrast, life was shaped by Vodou and other African-based traditions. These included a rich folklore of stories, legends, proverbs and songs (see Folktales). Customs of sharing and self-help, such as the konbit, helped peasant communities survive in the face of government indifference (see The Konbit).

U.S. Occupation

In the late 1800s, U.S. business interests such as sugar and fruit growers were expanding south, into the Caribbean. U.S. trade with Haiti was growing, and U.S. officials and business leaders wanted to make sure that European commercial interests did not compete. They especially feared the extensive German commercial involvement in Haiti. Using Haitian political instability as a justification, U.S. Marines invaded Haiti in 1915. They stayed for 19 years.

The U.S. imposed martial law and took control of Haiti's finances. It rewrote the Haitian constitution to permit foreigners to own land. U.S. investment in Haiti tripled between 1915 and 1930. Under U.S. military rule, roads, telephones and electricity were extended to some parts of Haiti. But many of the roads actually were built by Haitians who were forced to work without pay. This forced labor, along with the racist attitudes of many U.S. soldiers and administrators, caused widespread resentment.

A Haitian resistance leader, Charlemagne Péralte, led an army of peasant rebels who fought against the occupation. But the U.S. military put down the revolt, killing thousands of Haitians. Charlemagne Péralte was assasinated and his body put on gruesome display.

The United States finally pulled out of Haiti in 1934, leaving behind a legacy of anti-American feeling. It also left a U.S.-trained military force, the Haitian National Guard, which replaced the remnants of Toussaint's army. The Guard became the foundation of a new Haitian army, which involved itself in politics and held virtual veto power over election results. In 1957, François Duvalier, a doctor, was elected president with the Haitian army's and the U.S. government's support.

The Duvalier Regimes

Instead of keeping his promise to help the Black majority, "Papa Doc" Duvalier built a family dictatorship. He killed, imprisoned or exiled thousands of people who he thought might threaten his rule. To eliminate possible organized opposition, he destroyed or took over political parties, student organizations, trade unions, and the press.

Duvalier created an armed militia loyal to himself, the Tontons Macoutes. In 1964 he declared himself President-for-Life. Haiti would have no more elections.

Papa Doc died in 1971 after handing the presidency to his 19-year-old son Jean-Claude. The younger Duvalier, sometimes called "Baby Doc," executed fewer political opponents than his father. But he continued to use arbitrary arrest, torture and imprisonment.

Papa and Baby Doc

Haiti under the Duvaliers was marked by extremes of poverty and wealth, as it still is today. Per capita income was only $377 in 1985; most Haitians earned even less. The Duvalier family's fortune was estimated to be $500 million or more, most of it obtained through corruption. Government officials, army officers, coffee exporters and landowners lived in luxurious hillside villas with fountains and swimming pools. In the slums below, poor people crowded into wretched shacks crisscrossed by open sewers.

The unequal distribution of wealth in Haiti contributed to environmental destruction. Rich landowners, the state, and foreign companies controlled the best farm lands. As a result, poor farmers had to clear land on steep mountain slopes to plant their crops. As trees were uprooted, erosion stripped the soil away. Trees were also cut to make charcoal, the only fuel poor families could afford. The hills became barren and dusty.

Poverty forced hundreds of thousands of rural Haitians to migrate to Port-au-Prince in search of work. Others were recruited to cut sugar cane in the neighboring Dominican Republic, under conditions resembling slavery. Thousands more fled to foreign countries—the United States, Canada and France, among others. An estimated one million Haitians now live outside Haiti.

Aid from foreign governments and international lending agencies provided much of the revenue for Duvalier's government. Much of it disappeared into the pockets of corrupt officials. Foreign churches and charities provided most public services like clinics and schools.

The Haitian government's corruption prompted some donors to reduce their aid. But the United States continued its support. U.S. officials knew that Duvalier was brutal; but his anti-communism made him appear a useful ally. This policy protected the profits of U.S. businesses with investments in Haiti, but it did not benefit the majority of U.S. citizens. And by helping to keep a cruel dictator in power, Washington increased the suffering of the Haitian people.

Duvalier Overthrown

From the late 1970s onward, various factors weakened Jean-Claude Duvalier's hold on power. Foreign governments, including the U.S. under President Carter, urged Duvalier to ease repression. In response, Duvalier allowed some political parties, trade unions, human rights groups and independent journalists to function.

With the election of President Reagan in 1980, however, anti-communism again replaced human rights as the basis of U.S. policy. Twenty-four days after Reagan's election, the Duvalier government arrested more than 200 human rights workers, lawyers, trade unionists and journalists. The crackdown temporarily smashed the democracy movement, but Haitians' hopes for freedom had been raised.

Economic conditions became steadily worse for most Haitians. In 1978 a disease called African swine fever killed some Haitian pigs. To stop the spread of the disease, U.S. agencies supervised the slaughter of the entire Haitian pig population, including healthy hogs. For many rural families, the pigs had represented their only cash savings. Their loss left rural Haitians worse off than ever before.

Some wealthy Haitians were also becoming dissatisfied with Baby Doc. Quarrels among the powerful weakened Jean-Claude Duvalier's control.

The opposition movement that finally toppled Duvalier was not an armed insurgency. Nor was it led by politicians. Rather, the driving energy came from young Haitians—students, young working adults, schoolchildren—angered by the suffering under Duvalier.

They were encouraged by new forces within the Catholic Church. The Catholic bishops had long supported the Duvalier government, but many priests, nuns and lay Catholics did not. They lived and worked with the poor, and saw Haiti's problems through their

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eyes. These religious workers helped to organize the *ti legliz*, or little church. In these base Christian communities, Haitians came together to pray and discuss the country's problems. Church workers who spoke out against the government were jailed and even tortured. As a result, members of the Catholic hierarchy gradually turned against the regime.

Anti-government protests swept through Haiti in 1985. Encouraged by the Church, tens of thousands of people marched in processions, singing "We would rather die standing up than live on our knees!" During protests in the town of Gonaives, soldiers shot four schoolchildren dead. This was the turning point. Rebellion against the government spread through the countryside, finally reaching the capital.

Faced with widespread revolt, U.S. officials decided that Duvalier had to go. Two months after the Gonaives shootings, the U.S. government finally cut off economic aid to the Haitian government. Without U.S. support Duvalier could not stay in power. On February 7, 1986, a U.S. Air Force jet flew Duvalier and his family to exile in France.

Thousands of Haitians took to the streets in joyous celebrations. Afterwards, "Operation Uproot" sought to wipe out all traces of the Duvalierist past. Throughout Haiti, people organized to force Duvalier supporters from public office. Some Tontons Macoutes were lynched by angry mobs; most escaped into hiding.

Duvalierism Without Duvalier

For the first time in decades, people could discuss politics openly. They could form organizations not controlled by the government. Hundreds of groups sprang up, including farmers' associations, human rights groups, youth clubs and neighborhood committees.

Through these organizations, Haiti's poor sought major changes in their country. All Haitians, they argued, should have access to food, jobs, housing, land and education. The elected leaders should serve the people in a constitutional democracy.

These expectations were soon disappointed. After Duvalier left, U.S. officials helped organize a hasty transfer of power to a governing council composed of men who had been closely associated with Duvalier. The council did not enact any economic or land reform benefiting the poor. The minimum wage remained at $3.00 per day. When workers tried to form unions they were fired, just as in the old days under Duvalier. The council allowed notorious Duvalier officials to leave the country rather than face trials for killings and torture they had committed.

When people tried to protest peacefully, soldiers opened fire. Persons who spoke out against the governing council were arrested, or simply "disappeared."

The new leaders represented the same groups which had held power all along: wealthy civilians, high-ranking military men, Tontons Macoutes. They did not want to lose their privileges. Above all, they did not want any investigation into past human rights abuses. Haitians began speaking of the new government as "Duvalierism without Duvalier."

United States support helped keep the governing council in power. Soon after Duvalier's departure, the U.S. sent tear gas, truncheons and rubber bullets to help the Haitian army "keep order." The gear was used against unarmed civilians, and Haitians' anger at the United States grew.

U.S. officials argued that the governing council

Union Organizing After Duvalier

I cannot find words to adequately explain to you the true conditions under which we are working. Let me just give you a few examples. Workers at Fabnac are in temperatures of 35-45° C [95-113° F]. We breathe plastic and chemical materials without any protection. The noise surpasses all normal decibels. We receive15 gourdes [$3] for each day's work...

On March 11th, 1986, we wrote a letter which we sent to management, the Ministry of Social Affairs and all the press in the country. We told them that we workers at Fabnac had formed a union to ask for better working conditions and to claim our rights, as one is supposed to do in a democratic society. .

...To our great astonishment, they fired all those who had joined the union. The management formed its own union with three members, all heads of departments in the factory...Under the pretext that those who had been fired the previous day would return to create trouble, three truckloads of Leopards and Casernes Dessalines military arrived at Mews with automatic arms--machine guns, Uzis, M16s and galilles.

We realize that we have not become free since the 7th of February...

- a worker in Port-au-Prince at Fabnac, a company that made tennis shoes and Fab detergent. The worker would not reveal his name for fear of reprisal. March 23, 1986.

A victim of attack at a polling station. Photo: Mike Kamber.

would hold elections soon. But as the election date neared, it became clear that powerful groups in Haiti did not want voting to take place. Death squads roamed the capital, dumping bodies in the street. Arsonists torched the headquarters of the electoral commission, the company that printed the ballots, and the homes and offices of presidential candidates.

On Nov. 29, 1987—election day—truckloads of soldiers and Tontons Macoutes raced from one polling station to the next, strafing lines of voters with machine gun fire. By 9 a.m. dozens of people lay dead. The election was canceled.

The next two years saw a succession of leaders installed by army-controlled "elections" and coups. The vibrant democratic movement of youth, peasant groups and human rights organizations was forced underground. Many of its members were jailed, or forced to leave the country.

Lavalas

One of the few who dared speak out publicly against the regime was Father Jean-Bertrand Aristide, parish priest of a small church in one of the capital's most desperate slums. Fr. Aristide worked with the poorest Haitians. He founded an orphanage called *Lafanmi Selavi* (The Family Is Life) where homeless boys could study, play and work in a community.

Fr. Aristide preached fiery sermons about Haiti's need for a *lavalas*—a cleansing flood to rid the country of corruption and make it new. He talked about the army's brutality, and about how the rich in Haiti took advantage of the poor. He spoke about how foreign interests had controlled Haiti throughout much of its history.

Aristide's message angered members of the powerful class. Numerous attempts were made on his life. One Sunday morning in 1988, Aristide's parishioners were in church singing "Let the Holy Spirit descend on us. We have a mission for Haiti." Suddenly armed men blasted the church with machine gun fire. At least 13 churchgoers lay dead and 80 were wounded. The church burned to the ground.

Aristide's message also alienated the top levels of the Catholic hierarchy. A month after the church was attacked, the Vatican ordered Aristide to leave Haiti. In response, Haitians took to the streets in huge demonstrations of support for Aristide. They blocked the road to the airport, and Aristide remained in Haiti.

When the military rulers announced that elections would be held in 1990, Aristide announced his candidacy, calling the campaign Operation Lavalas. He said, "Alone we are weak; together we are strong. All together we are a deluge." He promised a government based on participation, honesty, and justice.

On Dec. 16, 1991, Haitians turned out by the thousands to vote for Lavalas. Aristide won with 67% of the votes--a landslide. A rival candidate backed and financed by the United States, Marc Bazin, received only 13% of the votes. International observer teams pronounced the election free and fair.

Haiti now had a democratically elected president for the first time in its history. He faced a daunting task. Expectations were high: Haitians hoped the new government would quickly dismantle the Duvalierist system, stimulate economic development, and provide everyone in Haiti with a decent quality of life.

In its seven months in office, Aristide's government made significant progress. It started the process of reforming the army and bringing it under civilian control. The notorious Tontons Macoutes

Let's put our shoulders together for a better Haiti
United Nations'
Mission of Observers Haiti 1990

Aristide:
In the Parish of the Poor

Father Jean-Bertrand Aristide is president of Haiti, currently in exile. A leading member of the Ti Legliz *(Little Church) movement, he has spent his life ministering to Haiti's poorest communities. Fr. Aristide gained the respect and love of many Haitians by speaking out fearlessly about the injustice in Haitian society. But his message angered those who profit from the system, and there have been several attempts to assassinate him. Here Fr. Aristide explains why the church should help organize for change.*

In Haiti, it is not enough to heal wounds, for every day another wound opens up. It is not enough to give the poor food one day, to buy them antibiotics one day, to teach them to read a few sentences or to write a few words. Hypocrisy. The next day they will be starving again, feverish again, and they will never be able to buy the books that hold the words that might deliver them. Beans and rice are hypocrisy when the pastor gives them only to a chosen few among his own flock, and thousands and thousands of others starve.

What good does it do the peasant when the pastor feeds his children? For a moment, the peasant's anguish is allayed. For one night, he can sleep easier, like the pastor himself. For one night, he is grateful to the pastor, because that night he does not have to hear the whimpers of his children, starving. But the same free foreign rice the pastor feeds to the peasant's children is being sold on the market for less than the farmer's own produce. The very food that the pastor feeds the peasant's children is keeping the peasant in poverty, unable himself to feed his children. And among those who sell the foreign rice are the big landholders who pay the peasant fifty cents a day to work on their fields; among those who profit from the food the pastor gives the children are the same men who are keeping the peasant in utter poverty, poverty without hope.

Would it not be better—and I ask the question in all humility, in its fullest simplicity—for the peasant to organize with others in his situation and force the large landholders to increase the peasants' pay? Would it not be wiser—more Christian—for the pastor, while he feeds those children, to help the peasant learn to organize? Isn't this a better way to stop the children's cries of hunger forever? As long as the pastor keeps feeding the peasant's children without helping deliver the peasant from poverty, the peasant will never escape the humiliating fate to which he has been assigned by the corrupt system. When the pastor only feeds the children, he is participating in that corrupt system, allowing it to endure. When the pastor feeds the children *and* helps organize the peasants, he is refusing the corrupt system, bringing about its end. Which behavior is more Christian, more evangelical?

I chose the second course, along with many of my colleagues... I chose to help organize youth, I chose to preach deliverance from poverty, I chose to encourage my congregation to hope and believe in their own powers. For me it is quite simple: I chose life over death. I preached life to my congregation, not life as we live it in Haiti, a life of mud, dank cardboard walls, garbage, darkness, hunger, disease, unemployment, and oppression. But life as a decent poor man should live it, in a dry house with a floor and a real roof, at a table with food, free from curable illness, working a meaningful job or tilling the fields to his or her profit, proud.

The only way to preach a decent poor man's life in Haiti is to preach self-defense, defense from the system of violence and corruption that ruins our own and our children's lives. I hope and trust that I have preached self-defense to my people. I would feel myself a hypocrite otherwise. And I would rather die than be a hypocrite, rather die than betray my people, rather die than leave them behind in the parish of the poor.

Excerpt from: Aristide, J-B. (1990.) *In the Parish of the Poor: Writings from Haiti.* New York: Orbis Books.
Photo: © 1992, Mev Puleo/Impact Visuals.

and rural police were reined in. Human rights abuses and street crime dropped dramatically.

The administration attacked government corruption, bloated payrolls and drug running. The economy began to grow again. Aristide quickly gained the confidence of foreign governments, and 15 international donors pledged $500 million in grants and loans for Haiti's development. Most important of all, the mood in Haiti changed to one of hope. The flow of "boat people" leaving Haiti slowed to a trickle, as Haitians began to see a future in their own country.

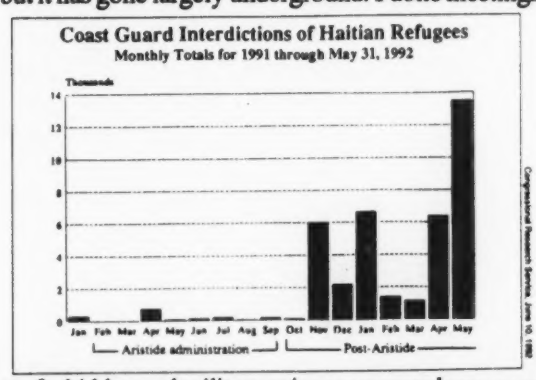
The Coup: Starting Again

The 1991 election had installed a popular leader, but it had not changed the underlying structures of the society. Corrupt army officers and wealthy civilians still held the real power. President Aristide's vow to root out corruption and reform the military challenged the power and privileges of these groups. On Sept. 29, 1991, the army staged a bloody coup d'etat. Aristide was forced into exile.

The military set up a series of puppet regimes to provide a facade of civilian rule. In 1992 Marc Bazin, the U.S. favorite, was installed as prime minister, but the armed forces remained in control.

The military unleashed a reign of terror aimed at silencing and destroying the democratic movement. An estimated 3,000 people were killed in the twelve months after the coup. Gunmen rode through poor communities which were known to support Aristide, firing randomly. The rural police chiefs were installed once again to terrorize the countryside.

Others, fearing for their lives, have gone into hiding. Resistance to the military regime continues, but it has gone largely underground. Public meetings



are forbidden and military spies are everywhere, even inside the schools. The dominant mood in Haiti now is anger and despair. "With Aristide, we never felt hungry even when we were starving," explained one Port-au-Prince shantytown resident. "Now we feel hungry after we've eaten, because we have lost him."

Within a month of the coup, refugees began pouring out of Haiti. During the seven months of Aristide's administration only 1,275 Haitian boat people had been picked up by the U.S. Coast Guard. That number exploded to almost 40,000 in the first 15 months of the military regime. After initially holding the refugees in a makeshift camp, the Bush Administration finally ordered that all Haitians picked up at sea be returned to Haiti. Even those who feared for their lives in Haiti would be given no chance to state their case for asylum in the United States.

Bush Administration officials wanted the flow of refugees to stop, but they were unwilling to address the cause of the problem—the illegal military regime and human rights abuses in Haiti. The United States joined Latin American countries in imposing a trade embargo on Haiti, but the embargo was weakly enforced, and it failed to persuade the military to give up power. U.S. media has been subject to the influence of public relations firms hired by the *de facto* government to down play human rights abuses and discredit President Aristide.

As 1993 begins, intense negotiations are under way to find a solution to the Haitian crisis. The incoming Clinton Administration has promised to change the Bush policy in regard to refugees. Whether the new President will also take strong measures to enable Aristide to return to Haiti remains to be seen.

For the vast majority of Haitians, the restoration of the democratically elected Aristide government is the only acceptable alternative. But other changes must take place in Haiti. High-ranking officers who were linked to Duvalier, who committed human rights abuses, or who were involved in coup d'etats must be replaced by officers whose pasts are clean. The military must be brought under civilian control. A new national police force, not connected to the army, will have to be formed. And major changes are needed in the judiciary system to sever it from its Duvalierist past.

Most Haitians, meanwhile, are struggling just to survive in a country where this requires tremendous courage and ingenuity (see Haitian Voices). Hopes for rapid change have died. But Haitians still have a vision of change, of a democratic society that permits a decent life for all its people. Haiti will not know peace until the patterns of the past are broken and this vision becomes a reality.

KEY DATES IN HAITIAN HISTORY

pre-1492 Homeland of the Taino Arawak people. Land is very fertile. Taino Arawak socio-economic system provides food for all the about one-million Tainos.

1492 Christopher Columbus lands and claims the island for Spain. Spanish build settlement of La Navidad.

1492-1550 Arawaks enslaved by Spaniards; forced labor and disease destroy Arawak population.

1520s Spanish begin importing African slaves to replace Arawaks' labor.

1629 French buccaneers establish base, leading to French settlement of western Hispaniola.

1697 Treaty of Ryswick divides Hispaniola into St. Domingue (French) and Santo Domingo (Spanish).

1750-90 St. Domingue produces more sugar than any other Caribbean colony, with labor of at least half a million slaves.

1791 Slave uprising led by Boukman.

1793 Slavery abolished in St. Domingue.

1798 Slave army led by Toussaint Louverture defeats British invasion force.

1802 Napoleon Bonaparte sends French troops to St. Domingue to restore slavery. Toussaint is captured.

1803 Army of former slaves, led by Dessalines, defeats French forces.

1804 Dessalines proclaims Haiti's independence.

1806 Dessalines assassinated.

1807-20 Haiti divided into northern kingdom ruled by Henri Christophe and southern republic governed by Alexandre Petion.

1820 Reunification under Jean-Paul Boyer.

1838 France recognizes Haitian independence in exchange for large financial indemnity.

1822-44 Haiti occupies Spanish Santo Domingo.

1862 United States recognizes Haiti.

1915 United States occupies Haiti.

1915-19 Charlemagne Peralte leads peasant resistance to occupation; captured and assasinated in 1919.

1934 U.S. occupation withdrawn.

1957 François Duvalier elected president.

1964 François Duvalier proclaims himself President-for-Life.

1970-80 s Shift from agriculture to assembly industry such as tennis shoes and baseballs. 85% of profit from industry goes to the United States. Efforts to protest low pay and dangerous working conditions are severely repressed.

1971 François Duvalier dies after naming his son Jean-Claude as President-for-Life.

1972 First Haitian "boat people" arrive in Florida.

1980 Crackdown on opposition groups; 200 journalists, lawyers and human rights workers arrested.

1981 U.S. and international agencies slaughter pigs in Haiti following outbreak of African swine fever.

1984 Anti-government riots in major Haitian towns.

1985 Soldiers shoot four schoolchildren during protests.

1986 Duvalier leaves with family for exile in France.

1987 National Governing Council formed, headed by Lieutenant General Henri Namphy.

1987 National election held Nov. 29, 1987. Soldiers and *Tontons Macoute* massacre voters; election is cancelled.

1988 Army holds fraudulent election; Leslie Manigat becomes figurehead president. Coup d'etats put Gen. Namphy in power, followed by Lt. General Prosper Avril.

1990 Haiti successfully holds first democratic elections. Aristide wins with 67% of the popular vote against a well-financed candidate backed by the United States.

1991 February: Aristide is inaugurated. The economy, education and human rights begin to improve. Flow of refugees slows to a trickle.

September: Army seizes power in coup d'etat; Aristide goes into exile. Severe repression is unleashed against democratic and grass-roots groups. Thousands of refugees begin fleeing Haiti in boats.

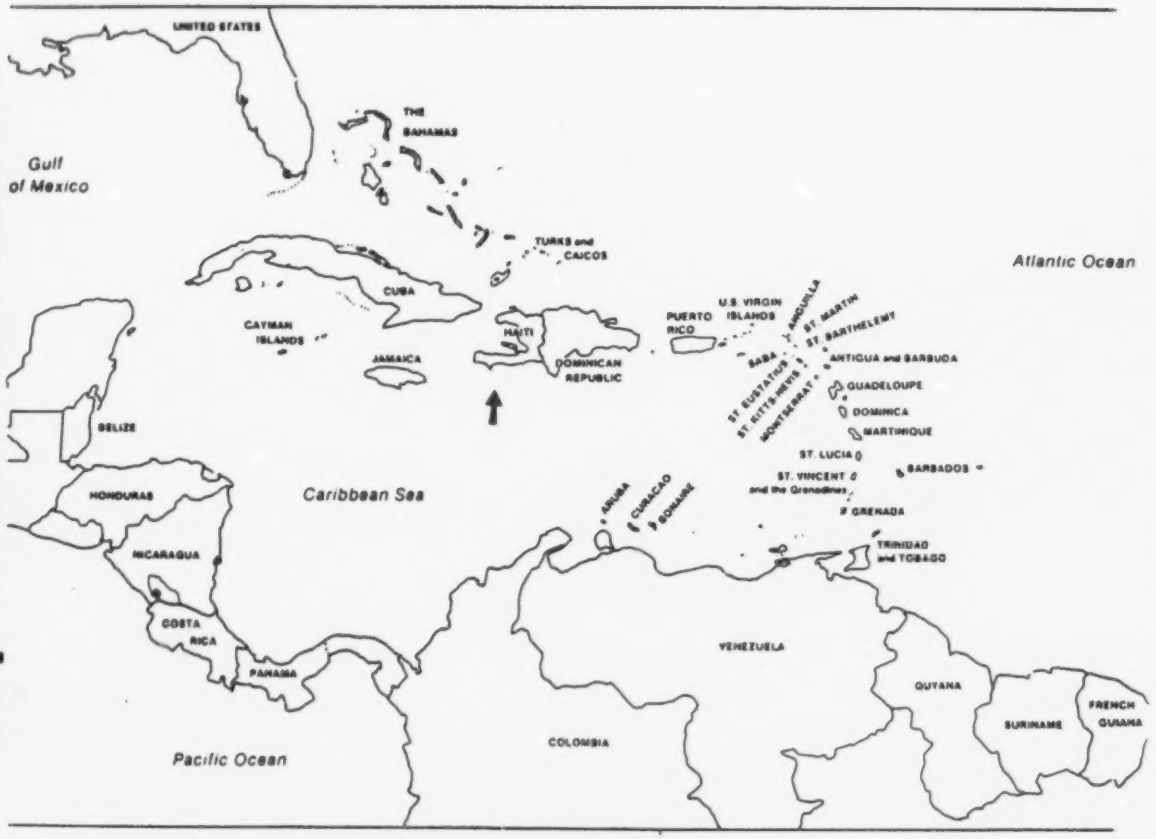
October: 34 member nations of the Organization of American States condemn the coup, call for Aristide's return and a trade embargo against the illegal military regime.

1992 May: President Bush orders U.S. Coast Guard to intercept all Haitians leaving the island in boats and return them to Haiti.

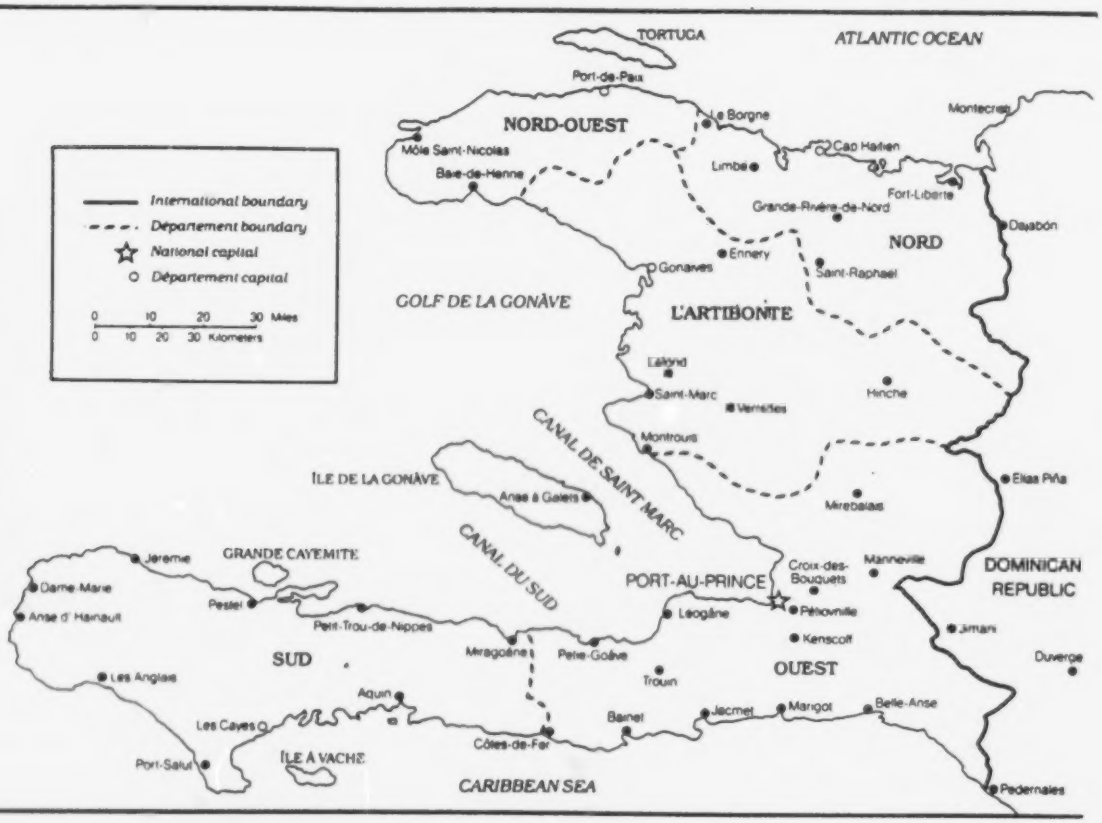
July: Marc Bazin, who won only 13% of the popular vote in 1991, is sworn in as prime minister.

September: First anniversary of the coup. President Aristide addresses the United Nations General Assembly. 50,000 people march in New York to show support for his return to Haiti.

Map of the Caribbean



Map of Haiti



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Haitian Folktales

In West Africa, storytelling was a richly developed art. Villagers would gather around a fire at night to hear one of their neighbors—perhaps an old woman or man—tell favorite tales. Many of these involved animal characters, such as the spider Anansi. Stories often told of a practical joke or trick, or sought to explain how a certain thing began.

Africans transported to the Caribbean, including Haiti, brought their folk traditions with them. These blended with elements of European folklore to become part of the cultural heritage of Caribbean peoples.

Many Haitian folktales center on two characters, Uncle Bouki and Ti Malice. Uncle Bouki is a laughable bumpkin—foolish, boastful and greedy. Ti Malice is his opposite, a smart character full of tricks. These same qualities are found combined in Anansi the spider, the hero of many Caribbean folktales. In Haiti, they are divided between the two characters of Uncle Bouki and Ti Malice.

Haiti's oral tradition also includes many other types of stories, proverbs, riddles, songs and games. Storytelling in Haiti is a performance art. The storyteller uses different voices for each character in the story, and often sings a song as part of the narrative.

UNCLE BOUKI GETS WHEE-AI

Uncle Bouki went down to the city to market, to sell some yams, and while he was there he got hungry. He saw an old man squatting by the side of the road, eating something. The old man was enjoying his food tremendously, and Bouki's mouth watered. Bouki tipped his hat and said to the old man, "Where can I get some of whatever you are eating?" But the old man was deaf. He didn't hear a word Bouki said. Bouki asked him then, "What do you call that food?" Just then the old man bit into a hot pepper, and he said loudly, "Whee-ai!" Bouki thanked him and went into the market. He went everywhere asking for five centimes worth of whee-ai. The people only laughed. Nobody had any whee-ai.

He went home thinking about whee-ai. He met Ti Malice on the way. Ti Malice listened to him and said, "I will get you some whee-ai."

Malice went down and got some cactus leaves. He put them in a sack. He put some oranges on top of the cactus leaves. He put a pineapple on top. Then a potato. Then he brought the sack to Bouki.

Bouki reached in and took out a potato. "That's no whee-ai," he said. He reached in and took out a pineapple. "That's no whee-ai," Bouki said. He reached in and took out oranges. "That's no whee-ai," he said. Then he reached way to the bottom and grabbed cactus leaves. The needles stuck into his hand. He jumped into the air. He shouted, "Whee-ai!"

"That's your whee-ai," Malice said.

Reprinted from Harold Courlander, *The Drum and the Hoe: Life and Lore of the Haitian People* (Univ. of California Press, 1960).

THE PRESIDENT WANTS NO MORE OF ANANSI

Anansi and all his smart ways irritated the President so much that the President told him one day: "Anansi, I'm tired of your foolishness. Don't you ever let me see your face again." So Anansi went away from the palace. And a few days later he saw the President coming down the street, so he quickly stuck his head into the open door of a limekiln.

Everyone on the street took off their hats when the President passed. When he came to the limekiln, he saw Anansi's behind sticking out.

He became angry and said, "Ki bounda sa ki pa salye mwen?" (Whose behind is it that doesn't salute me?)

Anansi took his head out of the limekiln and said, "Se bounda 'Nansi ki pa salye ou." (It's Anansi's behind which didn't salute you.)

The President said angrily, "Anansi, you don't respect me."

An artist's impression of Anansi.

Anansi said: "President, I was just doing what you told me to do. You told me never to let you see my face."

The President said, "Anansi, I've had enough of your foolishness. I don't ever want to see you again, clothed or naked."

So Anansi went away. But the next day when he saw the President coming down the street he took his clothes off and put a fishnet over his head.

When the president saw him he shouted, "Anansi, didn't I tell you I never wanted to see you again clothed or naked?"

And Anansi said, "My President, I respect what you tell me. I'm not clothed and I'm not naked."

This time the President told him, "Anansi, if I ever catch you again on Haitian soil I'll have you shot."

So Anansi boarded a boat and sailed to Jamaica. He bought a pair of heavy shoes and put sand in them. Then he put the shoes on his feet and took another boat back to Haiti. When he arrived at Port-au-Prince he found the President standing on the pier.

"Anansi," the President said sternly, "Didn't I tell you that if I ever caught you on Haitian soil again I'd have you shot?"

"You told me that, Papa, and I respected what you said. I went to Jamaica and filled my shoes with sand. So I didn't disobey you because I'm now walking on English soil."

Vocabulary

limekiln: furnace for making lime by burning limestone or shells

Port-au-Prince: capital of Haiti

English soil: Jamaica was still a colony of England when the story was told

Reprinted from: Courlander, H. (1960.) *The Drum and the Hoe: Life and Lore of the Haitian People*. University of California Press. Graphic courtesy of P. Hyacinth Galloway.

The Konbit: Working Together

In West Africa, most people live by farming the land. But clearing a field, planting a crop, or bringing in a harvest is often too much work for one family. As a result, many African societies have forms of cooperative labor exchange. When a member of the community needs help with a task, he or she calls for volunteers. Neighbors come together to do the job, and the host, for whom the work is performed, rewards them with food and drink. There is plenty of singing, joking and feasting, as well as hard work.

After slavery ended in the Caribbean, many Afro-Caribbean people became farmers. They continued the African tradition of work exchange, which goes by different names in different parts of the Caribbean. In Jamaica it is called "day work," "work sport" or "digging match." In Tobago it is "lend-hand," and in Trinidad "gayap." In Grenada it is a "maroon."

In Haiti the tradition is called a "konbit." (The French spelling is "coumbite.") It is so important to Haitian rural life that it is even featured in folktales and literature, such as the following excerpt from Haiti's classic novel, Masters of the Dew. *Here we see how the konbit tradition has been a source of strength and unity for Haitian rural communities.*

In those days when they all had lived in harmony, united as the fingers of the hand, they had assembled all the neighborhood in collective coumbites for the harvest or the clearing.

Ah, what coumbites! Bienaimé mused.

At break of day he was there, an earnest leader with his group of men, all hard-working farmers: Dufontain, Beauséjour, cousin Aristhène, Pierrilis, Dieudonné, brother-in-law Mérilien, Fortuné Jean, wise old Boirond, and the work-song leader, Simidor Antoine, a man with a gift for singing...

Into the field of wild grass they went, bare feet in the dew. Pale sky, cool, the chant of wild guinea hens in the distance. Little by little the shadowy trees, still laden with shreds of darkness, regained their color. An oily light bathed them. A kerchief of sulphur-colored clouds bound the summits of the mountains. The countryside emerged from sleep. In Rosanna's yard the tamarind tree suddenly let fly a noisy swirl of crows like a handful of gravel.

Casamajor Beaubrun with his wife, Rosanna, and their two sons would greet them. They would start out with "Thank you very much brothers" since a favor is willingly done: today I work your field, tomorrow you work mine. Cooperation is the friendship of the poor.

A moment later Siméon and Dorisca, with some twenty husky men, would join the group. Then they would all leave Rosanna bustling around in the shade of the tamarind tree among her boilers and big tin pots whence the voluble sputtering of boiling water would already be rising. Later Délira and other women neighbors would come to lend her a hand.

Off would go the men with hoes on shoulder... Lowering the fence poles at the entrance to a plot of land where an ox skull for a scarecrow blanched on a pole, they measured their job at a glance--a tangle of wild weeds intertwined with creepers. But the soil was

Continued on page16.

Continued from page 15.

good and they would make it as clean as a table top. This year Beaubrun wanted to try eggplant.

"Line up!" the squadron chiefs would yell.

Then Simidor Antoine would throw the strap of his drum over his shoulder. Bienaimé would take his commanding position in front of his men. Simidor would beat a brief prelude, and the rhythm would crackle under his fingers. In a single movement, they would lift their hoes high in the air. A beam of light would strike each blade. For a second they would be holding a rainbow.

Simidor's voice rose, husky and strong...The hoes fell with a single dull thud, attacking the rough hide of the earth...

The men went forward in a straight line. They felt Antoine's song in their arms and, like blood hotter than their own, the rapid beat of his drum.

Suddenly the sun was up. It sparkled like a dewy foam across the field of weeds. Master Sun! Honor and respect, Master Sun! We black men greet you with a swirl of hoes snatching bright sparks of fire from the sky. There are the breadfruit trees patched with blue, and the flame of the flamboyant tree long smoldering under the ashes of night, but now bursting into a flare of petals on the edge of the thorn acacias...

There sprang up a rhythmic circulation between the beating heart of the drum and the movements of the men. The rhythm became a powerful flux penetrating deep into their arteries and nourishing their muscles with a new vigor...

The high-class people in the city derisively called these peasants "...barefooted vagabonds..." (They are too poor to buy shoes.) But never mind and to hell with them! Some day we will take our big flat feet out of the soil and plant them on their behinds.

They had done a tough job, scratched, scraped, and shaved the hairy face of the field. The injurious brambles were scattered on the ground. Beaubrun and his sons would gather them up and set fire to them. What had been useless weeds, prickles, bushes entangled with tropical creepers, would change now to fertilizing ashes in the tilled soil. Beaubrun was overjoyed.

"Thanks, neighbors!" he kept repeating.

"You're welcome, neighbor!" we replied, but hurriedly, for dinner was ready. And what a dinner!...In the cauldrons, the casseroles, and the bowls were stacked with barbecued pig seasoned hot enough to take your breath away, ground corn with codfish, and rice, too, sun rice with red beans and salt pork, bananas, sweet potatoes, and yams to throw away!

Abridged from: Roumain, J. (1944.) *Masters of the Dew.*
Photo: Mev Puleo/Impact Visuals

Konbit's West African Roots

The Haitian cooperative work group has much in common with European and American husking and barn-building parties; but also has many non-European characteristics. The rhythmic, synchronized use of the hoe, the singing leader and the musicians who stand to one side to "encourage" the workers, the calling of the workers by drum rappels, the special consideration for the sick, and the concept of long-term community endeavor are all of West African origin. The konbit is the legitimate descendant of the Dahomean dokpwe, the kurum of the Mambila (Cameroons), the Ku of the Kpelle (Liberia) and other West African cooperative systems.

From: Courlander, H. (1960.) *The Drum and the Hoe: Life and Lore of the Haitian People.* University of California Press.

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Vodou: A Haitian Way of Life

What do you know about Vodou? What stereotypes about Vodou practices are typical in the United States? Discuss these and see how they compare with your views after you read this section.

In the following article, ***Donald Cosentino,*** *associate professor of African and Caribbean folklore and mythology at UCLA and co-editor of* African Arts Magazine, *introduces us to the history and practice of Vodou.*

Scholars now call the African-derived religion of Haiti Vodou, which means "spirit" in the Fon language. Fon people live in the West African country of Benin. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, many Fon, along with Yoruba and Ibo people from neighboring Nigeria, Kongo people from Zaire and Angola in central Africa, and other African ethnic groups, were forced into slavery and sent to the French colony that would become Haiti.

Although these people came from different cultures, they shared many religious traditions. They all revered a god who was the maker of all things. Because the distance between this supreme god and humans was very great, Africans also honored spirits who were less powerful than this god but more powerful than humans. These spirits included ancestors of the living, spirits of twins, and other spiritual beings who represented forces of nature (i.e. the ocean, sky, sun, lightning, and forests) or human emotions (i.e. love, anger, mercy, laughter, and grief).

In time, the slaves combined these common beliefs into one religion. They called the supreme being Bondye (from the Creole words for "good god") and identified Bondye with the Christian creator. Since Bondye was far away, they called on ancestral and twin spirits who lived nearby for supernatural help. Nonmortal spirits gathered together from many African religions are called *lwa.* They are thought to be very concerned with human welfare and are called upon to solve problems. There are hundreds of *lwa,* but the most famous include the kind and fatherly snake spirit Damballah; Ogun, a forceful military spirit; Erzuli, the queen of love and beauty; and Guede, a gross trickster who lives in graveyards but also loves and cares for children.

Because the *lwa* are close to humans, they enjoy human hospitality. Therefore, during a Vodou ceremony, the people may sacrifice a small farm animal, often a chicken or goat, to them. Afterward, the worshippers cook and eat the animal. To attract more divine attention, servants of the *lwa* draw special emblems, called *veve,* on the floors of the *hounfors* (Vodou temples) and dance and sing their favorite songs.

The *lwa* communicate with their servants through a spiritual possession of their minds and bodies. Spirit possession is common in many religions throughout the world, including the Pentecostal and Holiness churches in the United States. In Haiti, it is said that the *lwa* ride their servants like horses and sometimes are called divine horsemen. When a worshiper is being ridden, he or she speaks and acts like the *lwa*... Afterward, the person who was possessed cannot remember the experience.

The Haitian Revolution began in 1791 during a secret Vodou service when the slaves vowed to free themselves. Ever since Vodou has been a vital part of

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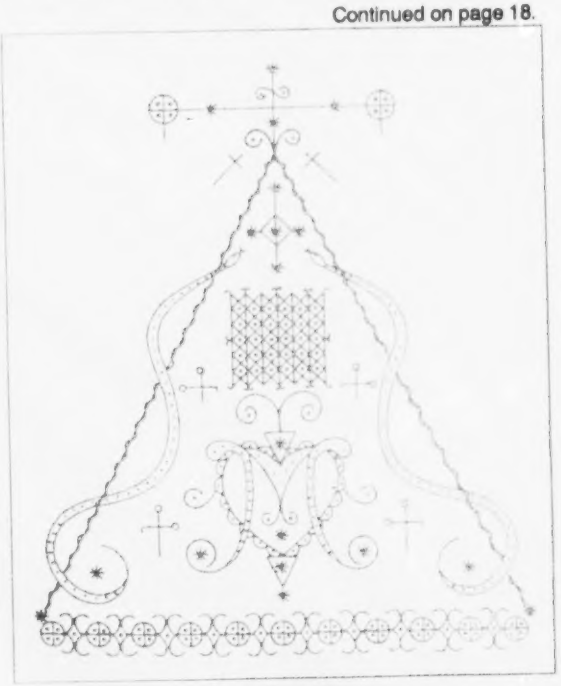


Veve Drawing
From: Ferere, Gerard Alphonse. (1989.) *LeVodouisme Haitien/Haitian Vodouism.* Philadelphia: St. Joseph's University Press. Bilingual Edition.

Haitian musician ***Ronald Derenoncourt*** *(Aboudja) plays in a musical group called* Sanba Yo, *which draws inspiration from the singing and drumming of Vodou services. In the following interview, he explains why he believes that Vodou is indeed "more than a religion"—it is a foundation of Haiti's way of life.*

For three years, Aboudja and fellow musicians conducted research on Vodou. We learned together about the people, the rhythms, rituals—not as tourists, but by spending months at a time with them. We came as students, and they were our teachers. I was arrested 27 times during my research. This was during the Duvalier regime, up until 1986.

In 1986, they formed the musical group Sanba Yo. Sanba, an indigenous word used by the Indians who lived on this island, means musician. Every member of Sanba Yo is involved in Vodou. *In vodou there is a spirit called the loa.* The loa is not a spirit in the Catholic sense, it is the energy that we keep locked inside ourselves. With the help of the music and the singing, we liberate that energy.

The slaves came here from all over Africa. Although they were forced to speak a certain way, adopt European names, and submit to baptism, they never forgot their culture. At night, they kept dreaming about freedom.

Many slaves fled the plantations, and these "maroons" created camps in the mountains. But they came from different ethnic groups, different cultural and religious backgrounds. In the maroon camps, in order to survive, they had to get together to work the land, practice their religion, and live. They needed a consensus, and that way of life was Vodou.

Vodou gave us our independence. It's the only resistant force we have in this country. It's the only force that really can resist cultural attacks from outsiders. Vodou is more than just a religion—it's really a way of life. Vodou is the fuel of this country.

There is a class of people in Haiti who have houses and cars; they are well off. But they are not patriotic about the history or culture of their country. Sure, they listen to our music and they like it, but they hear it as exotic music, like an American would.

The radio stations in Haiti don't play our music. There are just a few stations which begrudgingly give two hours a day for Vodou music. The people who control the radio must be interested in destroying their own culture, or they would play more traditional music. They are encouraging the city people to care more about Michael Jackson than about their own music.

Our mission is to publicize our music; that's why we sometimes have to go abroad. But we wouldn't mind staying here and playing our music for our own people, because our music belongs to them. Without them, it wouldn't exist.

Interview with Ronald Derenoncourt (Aboudja) by Kathie Klarreich, Port-au-Prince, 1989.

Continued from page 17.

Haitian history. Pictures of Catholic saints are painted on *hounfor* walls to represent the *lwa.* Catholic prayers and symbols are used in Vodou ceremonies. Ceremonial costumes, rituals, and designs are copied from the Free and Accepted Masons, a secret fraternity. Through these "recyclings," Vodou has helped African people to survive slavery and to make sense of their lives in the "New World." Vodou is a religion of tolerance. It has kept alive old African beliefs and borrowed freely from European traditions.

Not everyone in Haiti practices Vodou. Some Haitians are opposed to the religion, and followers of Vodou have often been persecuted by the government. But the new Haitian Constitution recognizes Vodou as the inheritance of all Haitians, and there is a growing appreciation in the United States of the influence of Vodou on our own culture. Vodou music has inspired American jazz and rock'n'roll. Paintings by Vodou artists such as Hector Hyppolite and Andre Pierre are now recognized as treasures of world art. If we put aside our negative stereotypes about "voodoo," we will see Vodou as an important and exciting expression of African culture in the New World.

Reprinted with permission from *Faces: The Magazine About People,* February 1992 issue on Haiti. A publication of Cobblestone Publishing, Inc. (See address and ordering information on p. 31.)

Haitian Voices

The majority of Haitians today have a vision of a democratic society that Haiti's military backed government does not share. This vision, and Haitians' determination to make it a reality, is Haiti's hope for the future.

The Haitian people's strength and courage has enabled them to keep on under adverse conditions. Strategies for economic survival vary. The vast majority of Haitians, like Anit, live by farming the land. Although Anit's plot of land is small, and her living conditions barely minimal, land ownership is her security for the future.

Others are not so lucky. Many peasants who have lost their land, or who cannot live on what they are paid for their crops, have had to move to the towns to seek work. Fifi earns $15 a month as a domestic servant in Port-au-Prince, cleaning the houses of well-off families. Her own family of seven lives in a one-room house without running water. Yet for many families in the city slums, conditions are much worse.

Beatrice has never known poverty, although her family is not rich. She has the opportunity most Haitians lack, to study and go to college. But her awareness of how those around her are suffering has led Beatrice to ask questions, and finally to commit herself to the struggle for change in Haiti.

The following section includes Anit's, Fifi's and Beatrice's stories, as well as the personal testimonies of street children, a political organizer and a Haitian-American first grade teacher.

The section below provides current data on Haiti. Numbers and statistics can't give us a complete picture of Haitian daily life. However, when used in conjunction with real life stories, these figures give us a background for understanding the conditions within which the majority of Haitians live and work.

(Please note that first names only are used throughout this section for the protection of those interviewed.)

Current Conditions

Population (1991-92) total: 6.47 million
- 14 years & younger 40%
- 15-64 years 55.9%

Population in Rural Areas (1988) 74%

Population in Port-au-Prince (1988) 684,284
- rudimentary dwellings 63%
- sanitation services 1%
- no toilet or latrine 30%
- no drinking water supply 90%

Life Expectancy (1992-92)
- overall 54.4 years
- women 55.7 years

Infant Mortality Rate (1991-92) 94.7/1000 live births
(U.S. infant average mortality rate: 9.8/1000 in 1989, District of Columbia 22.9/1000)

Child Deaths (1988)
- before first birthday 10-12%
- before age 5 20%

Malnourishment (1988)
- pre-school children 75%
  - mild 46%
  - moderate 25%
  - serious 4%

Illiteracy Rate (1991-92)
- overall 47%
- female 52.6%

Population Who Attend School (1988)
- between 6 and 24 years 38%

The 1991-92 statistics are from: *Social Indicators of Economic Development, A World Bank Book*. International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/World Bank. John Hopkins University Press. 1992.

The 1988 statistics are from: *Health Conditions in the Americas, Volume II*. Pan American Health Organization, 1990.

Suggestion: Students can prepare charts using this data.

Anit: Farming in a Small Village

Nestled in the hills above the town of Miragoane sits the tiny hamlet of Paillant. Most people walk the two hours back and forth to buy their goods.

Anit has lived in Paillant all of her 60-some years. You follow the small dirt road, passing Anit's sister's house, and stop just before reaching her brother's house.

Anit's property is defined by a neatly constructed fence of tree trunks bound together with twigs. You follow a narrow path that is swept every morning, and enter the *lakou*, a yard with mango, orange and avocado trees.

The house is multicolored, in typical Haitian style. The faded red and blue exterior is accented by neatly potted plants on the porch. Inside, there's a small room with two large beds, and another room that serves as both dining and living room. A small TV plays silently.

When they can, my children visit me. But life in Haiti is difficult. From Port-au-Prince to Miragoane, transportation costs 10 gourdes[$2]. Then another three gourdes from Miragoane to Paillant plus back again. My kids just don't have that kind of money.

Anit is lucky. She inherited land with her house, and it has provided her and her family an income to survive. She paid for all her children to go to school through the hard work she invested in her crops. Public school fees can cost anywhere from $5 to $75 a month, plus the additional cost of uniforms and materials.

The main crop in Anit's garden is corn, and she also grows beans and peas. Even though they are high in the mountains, it's too hot to plant other cash crops, such as onions, carrots and potatoes.

This year, my corn is dying because of the drought. In a good year, I can harvest 50 mamit [cans] at 10 gourdes per mamit. In a bad year, I may only harvest 10.

When she needed cash, Anit used to be able to sell her black Haitian pigs for up to $150 each. But several years ago, U.S. government agencies organized the slaughter of all Haitian pigs because of a swine fever epidemic. In spite of the Haitian government's promise to reimburse the peasants, Anit never received a dime for her four pigs they killed.

She did, however, hide one of her pigs, and hopes that this one will produce piglets. Anit also has chickens which lay eggs. She has a goat, but is waiting to fatten him up before she eats or sells him.

Anit is up at five every morning. She starts with household chores, helped by a young girl and boy who work for her in exchange for room and board. Anit's kitchen is a small grass hut beside the red and blue house, a common arrangement for rural Haitian households. Water is carried from a well ten minutes away.

The family normally eats corn, rice or millet, with the occasional addition of beef or goat meat which she buys wrapped up in leaves, from a neighbor.

When times are rough, like now, we eat soup made from water, some kind of leafy greens, a banana, and dumplings made from flour and water. We wash the pots and pans with water and scrub them with oranges and leaves to get them clean.

But I am never discouraged. I wake up every morning and pray. I ask for strength and endurance. I'm Catholic and go to church every Sunday, but I believe in vodou too. If someone gets sick, I go to the herbal doctor first, because the regular doctor charges $5 just for a consultation, and then you have to have cash to buy medicine. They don't give credit.

I'm waiting for times to get better. We don't have anything left to lose now, so what can we do? I am lucky, I've led a good life, and I have nine healthy children and more than ten healthy grandchildren. And I still have my land. Not everyone in Haiti can say that.

Prepared by Kathie Klarreich from interviews conducted in Port-au-Prince in 1989.

Fifi: Raising a Family in the City

Fifi moved from the southern town of Jeremie when she was thirteen. With barely enough money to feed themselves, the family could not afford to send Fifi to school. As a result, she never learned to read or write.

Although rural life was hard, life in Port-au-Prince is anything but easy for Fifi. She, her husband Jean-Paul and their five children live in a one-room house.

The house has electricity, but Fifi has to walk to a public tap to get water. There is one bed, a chair and a television, but no table, fan or radio. They pay $150 in rent every six months, plus $3 per month for electricity.

Fifi's husband used to do masonry, repairing and cleaning for an apartment building, earning $60 a month. But he has recently been fired. Now he earns only small amounts washing cars, and the family depends on Fifi's income.

I am responsible for taking care of my whole family. And all I am earning is $15 a month. I wash Mr. Pierre's clothes once a week, and in the mornings I clean his house. I used to have more jobs doing the same thing for other people, at $30 per job. But those people have moved away, and here I am, stuck with almost nothing.

Sometimes I make peanut butter to get a little extra money on the side. There are times when I don't even have enough money to buy the peanuts. Usually I buy two mamits[cans], which costs about $2.80 and is enough to make two jars. I have to pay someone 20 cents to roast the nuts, and at least another 20 cents to use their grinder. If I'm lucky, though, I can sell the peanut butter for $2 per jar.

We eat mostly rice, beans and corn. A mamit of rice costs about $3, beans $4, and corn $1.30. One mamit lasts about three days. A gallon of cooking oil is $4 or $5, and then we spend about $10 a month on charcoal for a cooking fire. Plus there are the daily things we need to put in the food, like spices, salt, garlic and bouillon cubes. Occasionally I buy a chicken in the market for $3 or $4 but we don't splurge like that very often.

Fifi is not sure if she will be able to continue to send her children to school.

It's not just school fees. There are uniforms which cost $7 and right now they each have only one; even if it is dirty, they have to wear it. Then there are supplies—notebooks cost 40 cents each, erasers and sharpeners 30 cents, pens 20 cents, and pencils 10 cents.

Plus I have to pack them lunch. That's at least another $20 a month. If I don't have money to give them for lunch that day, I won't let them go to school. I refuse to have them beg.

Prepared by Kathie Klarreich based on interviews conducted in Port-au-Prince in 1989.

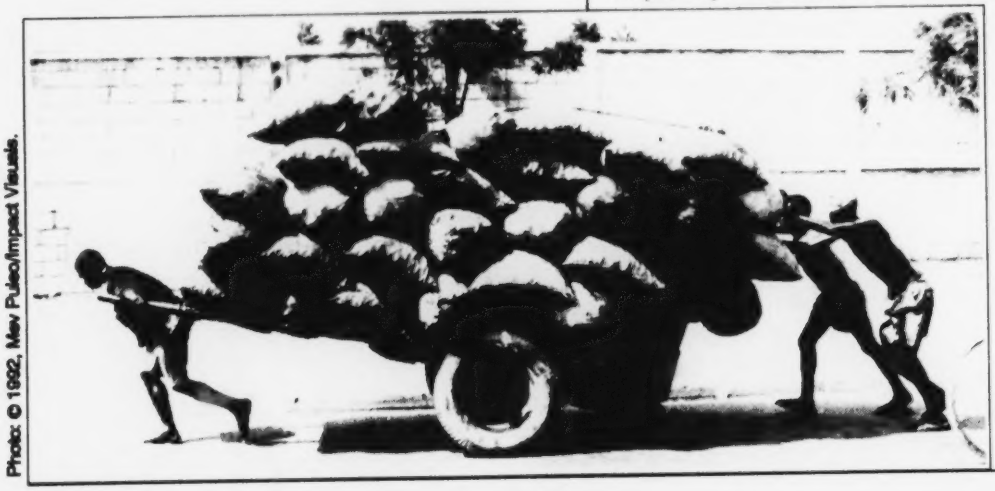


Photo: © 1992, Mev Puleo/Impact Visuals.

Port-au-Prince: Men pulling carts filled with bags of charcoal. The minimum wage in Haiti is $3 a day--these men often earn less. It is sa[id] have a l[ife] of only 7 [years] after they begin this work due to the strain to their bodies.

Beatrice: High School Student

In Haiti, there is a big difference between the "*ti bourgeoisie*" and the bourgeoisie. I grew up in the "*ti bourgeoisie*" class, and for us life isn't really privileged. We don't suffer from lack of food or shelter, but we don't have extra each month to do many things. The bourgeoisie are the ones with the big homes and fancy cars. They can afford to eat in restaurants and travel. We don't have a car or even running water in the house.

So when I became involved in the struggle to liberate Haiti, I was not rebelling against my class. Instead, I was trying to improve the situation for those even less fortunate than me. It is more a concept of redistribution, because the wealthy here have everything and the poor have absolutely nothing.

I've always been called a rebel at home or in school. I remember once I was chosen by the school to be the flagbearer in the annual flag-day parade. I refused, saying that I'll never set foot in the National Palace yard. The principal told me that it was the least I could do, to pay back the government for giving me a free education. I had to do it, but when I got to the grounds of the Palace yard, I gave the flag to someone else.

In 1986, I decided to drop out of school for a while. This was the time that everyone was looking for a way to change things in Haiti. People were willing to stop what they were doing and get involved in liberating the country. We finally had freedom to organize, freedom for the press. We wanted to take advantage of this new opening.

That's why, along with other young people of mixed economic background, we founded a group called SAJ (Solidarity with Youth) at St. Jean Bosco Church. We formed this group to help. Now we have local branches in Les Cayes, Verette, Jacmel and other places in the country.

We work towards social justice—to make Haiti a place where everyone can find food, health care, good education, and a decent place to live. We want to put an end to the old order of things where only a small group of people own everything.

Beatrice and other members of her group worked with a church sponsored adult literacy program called Mission Alpha. When people got interested in Misson Alpha, it opened their eyes to problems existing at the very core of the Catholic Church. Not only the church, but the other big institutions that control the country, like the military. The Bishops felt threatened and ended the program. Now they want to resume it but on one condition: that the program limit itself to teaching people to read without mentioning their everyday social and economic situation.

I dedicated my body and soul to this program. So I can't find words to explain how hurt I felt when the Bishops stopped it. I felt that some light I had inside which was motivating me had died. My only hope was that the people who benefited from the program would pressure the government to continue it.

Before Jean-Claude Duvalier left the country, when we founded the group in St. Jean Bosco Church, I felt pressure from my family, mostly my mother. She was scared for me, scared that I would be killed by some trigger-happy Tonton Macoute. My mother used to tell me that what she spent for my education was a waste, and then burst into tears.

Now things are a little better. She sees things differently than she did a couple years ago.

Before, when I went out with my friends, I thought dressing up and looking sharp was really important. I had to wear a different outfit each time I went out. When I dressed up, I felt like somebody. Now, I can go two or three months without new clothes, and I still feel like a person.

There are so many people who don't have food, who have to go without the absolute basic necessities. Where I used to spend money on material things like clothes, today I spend what little extra I have differently. Like buying pencils and paper, that can aid people to gain literacy.

For each of us it's an individual fight that we can only win by working together. My hope is that the people will finally organize themselves, forget their minor differences and work together to win the fight.

Beatrice was interviewed by Kathie Klarreich in Port-au-Prince in 1989.

Fatil and Ayiti: Living on the Streets

Children are hardest hit by the poverty in Haiti. Thousands migrate to the capital, Port-au-Prince, in search of work. Large numbers of children become domestic servants in the city and others, such as Fatil and Ayiti, are sold into slavery to cut sugar cane in the neighboring Dominican Republic.

FATIL, age 18

Life in Haiti is good for the wealthy and sorrowful for the poor. What the poor people are going through is comparable to being born a slave. Where else do you find thousands of kids sleeping in the streets, knowing they will wake up in the morning without a *gourde* [20 cents] to buy food? When we try and work in the streets cleaning cars, the wealthy people only look down on us.

One day, a friend of ours came to see us, a guy named Jean Marc. He promised to take us to the capital of the Dominican Republic, Santo Domingo, where he thought we could find work. We accepted because we knew there was nothing positive here for us, and we trusted him. I called Eril and Ayiti, and we went along with him.

When we got to the border, we were told to get out of the car and continue on foot. We climbed a mountain and ended up at a military station in Jimani where we had to give our names and sit and wait. Jean Marc went for some water and never came back. We never saw him again.

Then we were told we weren't going to Santo Domingo, but to a *batey* [worker camps] to cut cane. We said we couldn't do that because we didn't know how. At that point we were told we had each been sold for 75 *gourdes* to cut cane, and if we refused we would be thrown in jail. We had to agree.

We got to the *batey* and found out exactly what it was: heavy work. The leaves of the cane stalks cut us like blades. They told us if we returned to our country they would beat us, arrest us and throw us in jail.

AYITI, age 12

They gave us rice, oil, bouillion cubes, and a bit of dried fish. For work, they gave us a machete and something to sharpen it with. We had a mattress of dried grass woven together, and an empty gallon can to keep water in.

We started work every morning at 6 am, and stayed out in the hot fields until noon. Then we went back from 1 pm until 6 pm. Afterwards we washed, cooked, and collapsed on our straw mattresses.

I was smaller than the other guys, too small to do the work. I cooked for Eril and Fatil, and when they came back from cutting cane we ate together.

One day we decided we had had enough. So one by one we washed our clothes. When they were nice and clean, we put them on and escaped.

When we got to Santo Domingo, we were lost. Someone we met convinced us to stay in the Dominican Republic and work at his construction site. After a little while, I decided to leave. I wasn't making any money, and Fatil and Eril had to support me. So I said goodbye to my friends, and without even one *gourde* in my pocket, I found my way to the bus station. I waited for the right time to sneak on the bus. I didn't make it, though. The driver saw me and kicked me out. I went behind a restaurant and fell asleep.

Two Haitian men woke me up and asked what I was doing. I explained I'd been sold to cut cane and was trying to find my way back to Haiti. They had a brother who was a truck driver, and they said I could ride on the top of his big truck.

At one of the check points, the police made me get down. They said they would arrest me because I didn't have any papers, and they would throw me back in a *batey*. But I was lucky. Three other Haitians said I could hide in their big truck, and I crawled in and escaped from the station.

The officials at the border demanded to see my passport. Of course I didn't have one. I explained I'd been forced to enter the country without one, and if they didn't let me go, I'd cross the mountain in front of us on foot. I was fortunate, because I found someone who spoke Creole. He said I could cross the border without a passport, and he gave me five *gourdes*. I was so happy. I made it all the way back.

Interviews by Kathie Klarreich in Port-au-Prince in 1989

Taste of Salt: A Story Of Modern Haiti
by Frances Temple
To learn more about the life of children in Haiti, read the fictionalized account of 17-year-old Djo. Written for high school and adult readers. Recommended by *School Library Journal*. Ordering information, p. 31.

Pierre: Political Refugee Denied Asylum

For over a hundred years, Haitians have endured some of the most brutal human rights abuses in the Western Hemisphere. The pattern of violent repression has resulted from corrupt government leadership (supported by the United States) and a powerful military. Unfortunately, some of the worst cases of abuse have been recorded within the last several decades.

The Duvaliers (1957-1986) executed and exiled thousands of people. Their own police force, the Tontons Macoutes, carried out the genocide against any organized opposition.

Haiti's human rights record improved dramatically under President Aristide. However, after the coup in 1991, the de facto government immediately launched a campaign of violent repression. Reported human rights violations include torture and short-term arbitrary arrests without warning accompanied by severe beatings. An estimated 3,000 people have lost their lives.

The military and police forces have systematically targeted President Aristide supporters, especially in the rural areas. Among the most severely repressed are the women's groups, peasant development groups, trade unions, church groups and youth movements. An estimated 200,000 people are in hiding.

Those who have attempted to flee the country, have faced the additional risk of detention at Guantánamo, or being returned to Haiti by the U.S. Coast Guard. Attorney Catherine Cassidy participated in the March 1992 Pax Christi USA team researching human rights violations in Haiti since the coup. While there, she interviewed Pierre, a Haitian repatriated from Guantánamo, now in hiding in Port-au-Prince.

I am twenty-one years old. I was very active supporting Aristide. The voting bureau was at my house. The military was all over our neighborhood after the coup d'etat on September 30. A group of soldiers came to my house on October 1. I was home in the back but my sister talked to them. The soldiers asked for me and my sister told them I was not home. When they started to search the house I fled out the back. I knew they were killing people who took a stand for Aristide. I hid for two months in a place south of Port-au-Prince. The situation did not improve with the military—they were asking for me by name—so I knew I had to leave the country. About December 13, I took a boat with 18 others and was picked up by the US Coast Guard.

My brother, Paul was with me on Guatanamo. I was interviewed on December 19 and 27. My impression of Guantanamo was one of disorganization. People did not have control. I told the woman interviewer what had happened to me. She spoke Creole but not very well. The Immigration promised to call me and said my interview was good. When I was called, it was to return to Haiti.

On February 3, 1992, the Coast Guard took me and many others to Port-au-Prince. I was very afraid because there were soldiers around and they took our pictures and fingerprints. At the port, a TV crew from World Monitor TV Boston asked me how I felt. I did not feel comfortable talking to them with the military around. I was afraid of them but they said I could trust them so I let them take me to my house. They filmed me and my family in my home and outside with their cameras. Many people came around because of the TV crew and van. I got very nervous. The TV journalists gave me a letter with their phone number and left.

Shortly after, two soldiers came and asked me where I had been. I said in Cap Haitian. They said I was lying and that they would be back. I left because I knew I could not sleep in my house anymore. I called the TV journalists and they took me to their hotel. That night the military came to my home. They beat my mother, sister and niece because they were "Lavalas". They asked for me but could not find me.

Since then my family has left the house. My brother Paul who was also later returned to Haiti has disappeared. He met with my mother in hiding but has not been heard from since. I am afraid he could be dead because he would have contacted my mother by now.

Photo: Haiti Progrès

Source: *A Dream Deferred: Human Rights in Haiti.* A Joint Report by Pax Christi USA, Global Exchange, Leadership Conference of Women Religious, Washington Office on Haiti, Witness for Peace. March/April 1992.

Lily Cérat: Haitian-American School Teacher

Haitians abroad have played a dynamic role in Haiti's political, economic and cultural life. Here we learn about the experiences of one Haitian immigrant in New York, home of the largest population of Haitians outside Haiti.

Marie Lily Cérat is a mother, a first grade teacher at P.S. 189, and an activist in Brooklyn's Haitian community. She spoke to NECA about why she came to the United States, about what being Haitian means to her, and about her dream of freedom and democracy for her homeland.

Photo Credit: © 1992 Donna DeCesare/Impact Visuals

Ms. Cérat teaches 1st grade Haitian and African-American students. What are they studying? Many of their lessons are in Creole. Did you know that after Spanish, Creole is the most common foreign language spoken by students in New York public schools?

Why did you leave Haiti?

Both political and economic motives were entangled in our departure. My father came in 1968 during Papa Doc's dictatorship when men his age were persecuted and killed for trying to better their future. My mother followed him in 1978. Three years later, when I was 19, I too came to New York.

How did you find life in New York compared to Haiti?

In New York you live indoors spiritually, you are afraid of the next person, afraid of your neighbors. At first, I was very homesick. It was meeting old friends among our large, closely knit Haitian community that kept me going.

We all complain about the winter. The first winter is very harsh, but every time it comes you feel terrible.

I discovered prejudice in New York. I was fired from my first job at an Arby's restaurant when they found out I was from Haiti.

How important are Haitian immigrants to Haiti ?

Haiti relies greatly on the diaspora in New York, Miami, Montreal and also in Europe. One reason is economic. The money that we send back to our families is the backbone of the economy. But politically we have also helped. During both Duvalier dictatorships many of our journalists and activists from the opposition relocated and continued their work from here. So people in our community are informed.

The protest marches we have held, especially since the coup d'état against Aristide, have played an important role in pressuring U.S. politicians.

Have you noticed any changes in the Haitian immigrant community since you've come here?

The political views and the life of the immigrant community have expanded since Aristide first came on the scene. Aristide has always spoken Creole. All Haitians speak and understand Creole. [Only 10% speak French.] Since the coup the politicians are using the old tactics to marginalize the people. They are using French in the Parliament and to address the nation.

Aristide raised people's consciousness both here and in Haiti. The people cannot be put off in a corner by the politicians. They want a leader who speaks their language, who communicates.

In your school, what do you teach children about the people of Haiti?

I teach them that we are a determined people, we are proud and honest. I know that other people have these characteristics too, but we are strong like trees and we are self-assured. We are intelligent even when we are illiterate. Despite the odds against us in Haiti and in New York we have tremendous intuitive gifts for survival. As a child I never knew my mother was illiterate because her other senses gave her the information the written words couldn't. And I know, I really know, that eventually Haiti will be for Haitians and Haiti will be free.

Songs of Resistance

Music plays an integral role in the social and religious activities of Haitian everyday life. Historically Haitian music developed through the synthesis of European and various African musical traditions. Some of the African musical characteristics are the collective quality by which the performers engage the participation of the audience, the featuring of percussion instruments, and the emphasis on improvisation. The most pervasive feature of the music is its use for social commentary. Since a majority of the population is illiterate, information and ideas are shared through music. One contemporary group that communicates its political views through music is called the ***Boukman Eksperyans****.*

Boukman Eksperyans

In the aftermath of the September 1991 coup against President Aristide, Boukman Eksperyans has continued to play despite censorship and intimidation. Three of their songs were banned by the military authorities in 1992 as "too violent" and radio stations were prohibited from playing them. One of these songs, *Kalfou Danjere* states that those who lie, cheat, kill, and steal will be judged at the crossroads, a place of central importance in Vodou metaphysics.

Soldiers and Macoutes are a fixture at Boukman concerts where they try to prevent the group from playing censored songs. It is thanks to the informal cassette industry in Haiti, to the support of Haitian immigrant communities abroad, and to international exposure that the voices of Boukman Eksperyans evade the efforts of authorities to silence them.

Language

A few terms in the English version of Boukman's songs are in their original Creole because they defy straightforward translation.

Ginen is derived from the name of a region of West Africa (Guinee) and has a complex set of meanings. It can be used to refer to the African homeland, to a spiritual realm where the Vodou deities live, and to a more general state of spiritual development and awareness for Haitians who practice Vodou.

Lakou. Peasant settlements in post-revolutionary Haiti were based on an African style of extended family residence around a central courtyard. This type of collective living arrangement is still practiced in much of Haiti, even in the urban areas, and is called a *lakou* or courtyard. In the songs, the lakou is a symbol of deep family roots and traditions, a tie to land and place, and a sense of commitment and community.

Lwa. Afro-Haitian religion recognizes a supreme deity, Bondye, and a large number of ancestral spirits and deities of natural forces and human archetypes. These deities are known as *lwa*, *miste*, or *zanj*. Some *law* are: **(Met) Gran Bwa** an Afro-Indian deity of the deep woods; **(Kouzen) Azaka/Zaka** an agricultural *lwa* protector of peasants and farmers.

Background

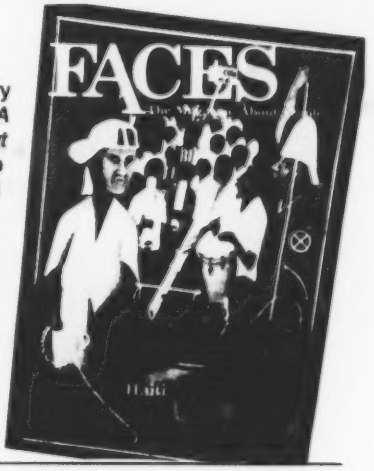
Soul in a Bottle: is a protest against those who control others and force them to live by foreign cultural standards. The bottle refers to certain practices of *Boko*, or sorcerers, who are reputed to be able to control people by capturing their souls in bottles.

Our Ancestors: Congo, in addition to being an ethnic grouping in Haiti, is also a term used derogatorily for someone who looks like a rural mountain inhabitant. *Our Ancestors* talks of taking pride in being called Congo. They draw parallels between traditional Haitian culture and Jamaican Rastafarianism.

The above text and the following songs are from the compact disk *Kalfou Danjere* (1992) Island Records, Inc. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission of Balenjo Music/Songs of Polygram, Inc.

Haitian Art

The February 1992 issue of *Faces: A Magazine About People* features the art and culture of Haiti for grades 4-7. Readings and hands-on activities. See p. 31 for ordering information.



Cover of February issue by popular Haitian artist Julien Valéry.

Boukman Eksperyans

Photo: Steve Winter

Nanm Nan Boutèy

Anye, sa rèd o!
Anye, sa rèd o!
Nanm nou lan boutèy
Sa rèd o!

Sa rèd o!
Anye, sa rèd!

Sa rèd o wo!
Sa rèd o!

Nou bezwen pale kou moun sa yo
Nou bezwen wè kou moun sa yo
Nou bezwen tande kou moun sa yo
Nou bezwen gade kou moun sa yo

Nanm nou lan boutèy anye
Wa ayo o!

Anye sa rèd o wo wo!
Sa rèd o!

Ki lè nape rive o!
Ki lè nap pran Konsyans
Me Zanmi sa rèd o!

(Repeat) Ouyèe nan revolisyon na pwale

Lyrics by: T. Beaubrun Jr. and Mimerose Beaubrun.
© 1992 Balenjo Music/Songs of PolygramInternational, Inc.

(English Translation)

Soul In a Bottle

Hey, this is rough!
Hey, this is tough
Our soul in a bottle
This is tough!

This is tough!
Hey, this is tough!

This is tough!
This is really tough!

We have to speak like these people
We have to see like these people
We have to listen like these people
We have to look like these people

Our soul in a bottle
Wa ayo o!

Hey, this is tough!
This is tough!

When will we arrive
When will we take a stand
My friends this is tough!
We're going to join the revolution!

See page 30 for discussion questions.

Listen To Me

Chorus: Listen to me
Understand me
Listen to me
The truth is talking

The truth speaks
Children come to listen
Listen to me
A revolution is truly starting

Yes, the truth speaks
Children gather together
Listen to me
Love will truly govern
(Chorus)

Yes, the truth talks
Ginen come to listen
Listen to me
All of the Indian spirits return

Yes, the truth speaks
Three words speak
Listen to me
Oh, *ginen* will govern

Listen to me the truth speaks
A little chat speaks
The truth is talking the truth is talking
Human beings, if you're there, come to listen
(Chorus)...

Lyrics: Mirlande Beaubrun & T. Beaubrun Jr. © 1992 Songs of Polygram International, Inc. and Balenjo Music

Listen to Me/Tande M Tande. For Discussion

1. Currently many political decisions are made based on what will be most financially "profitable" for business. How would the world be different if the Boukman's concept of "love" goverened?
2. Boukman band says "the truth is talking." Some people would say that there is not one truth about history, but instead that there are different, equally valid perspectives. Using Haiti as an example, is there one historical truth to be known or are there two equally valid interpretations of reality?
3. Using the same chorus as in *Listen to Me*, write a song or poem about the truth of your own community or city. What do you want children to know that they might not be hearing in the traditional media?
4. The song talks about how *Ginen* will govern and Indian spirits will return. What would this mean? Would this be better? Why or why not?

Our Ancestors

...Our ancestors
Nago people
Vodou Congo
Natty zing, natty dread
Nago Yoruba
Wo wo wo wo wo

Our ancestors
Congo people
Our true family
Natty dread, natty zing
From the Mandingo and the Fon peoples...

Congo oh! oh! (Repeat after every line below)
Congo doesn't bother me
You'll call me Congo
to dismiss me as backwards
Congo doesn't bother me
Swearing doesn't bother me

Refrain: The Congo queen rises
Rises, rises, rises, rises

Congo oh! oh! (Repeat after every line below)
Congo doesn't bother me
You call me Congo
to dismiss me as backwards
Congo doesn't bother me
Wherever you go, you try to panic me
Congo doesn't bother me
Swearing doesn't annoy me
Congo doesn't bother me...
(Repeat refrain)

Our Ancestors/ Zansèt Nou Yo. For Discussion

Two students can prepare to read the song aloud. They can ask the rest of the class to repeat "Congo oh! oh!" at the appropriate times. Then discuss:

1. What groups in your community are looked down on as poor people are in Haiti? How is this seen, e.g. insults, job discrimination. What are the categories? (e.g. race, rural vs. urban, class, gender, etc.)
2. Boukman speaks of the links between the people of Haiti and the Rastafarians in Jamaica. What links can you see between people in your own communities? Or across borders, e.g. between you and people in Haiti?
3. Share a geographic map of Africa. Why are the names of the peoples in the song who were brought as slaves not easily found on the map? Compare the colonization of Africa with the colonization of the Caribbean.

Please note: Due to space limitations, only the English translations are included of these two songs. The original Creole is on the disk.

Teaching/Action Ideas

1. **Math and Economics. a.** To investigate the cost of living in Haiti, refer to the interview with Fifi on page 29. Calculate her monthly earnings, assuming that she sells 10 *mamits* of peanut butter a month to supplement her income from housekeeping. Now calculate her monthly expenses, including rent, electricity, food, and school lunch. (You will need to multiply the cost of the school supplies by the number of children she has and then divide by 12 months. First you will have to determine how many pencils, pens and notebooks each child should have for the year.)

Can Fifi's family survive on her income, now that her husband is out of work? If not, what are her options? **b.** Duvalier is estimated to have deposited approximately $86 million in private overseas accounts in the early 1980s. This includes funds skimmed in the processing and distribution of U.S. food aid. Given the current cost of living that you have calculated for Fifi's family, how many families could have lived on this money for a month? For a year?

Refer to the section in this teaching guide on Fairness in the Media. Taking the amount that Ron Brown was paid each month to represent the Duvalier government, how many families could have lived on this amount per month? Per year?

c. To further your study of math and economics, investigate the impact of the assembly plants in Haiti. Calculate how much money was taken out of Haiti by U.S. assembly plants in a particular year. Then make a list of the type of grassroots development projects which could have been supported with those funds. Sources for relevant information listed on page 31 are: *The Other Side of Paradise* and *Haiti: A Look at the Reality*. In addition, the Inter-American Foundation and Oxfam have useful figures on the cost of development projects.

2. **U.S. Policy.** Simulate a Congressional Hearing on U.S. policy toward Haiti. Five students can form a Congressional Committee. The remaining students can select one of the roles below and provide testimony. (Some of these roles are directly from the publication.) These witnesses are to convince the Congressional committee of their recommendation for U.S. policy. To prepare,write an interior monologue from the perspective of your role. Write about some of the most dramatic changes that have happened in your life in the last ten years and your hopes for the future. (Students can align themselves with other witnesses to coordinate testimony.)

a. Fifi **b.** Beatrice **c.** Lily **d.** Anit
e. Member of the Boukman Eksperyans band
f. Military general
g. CEO from a baseball manufacturing company
h. Representative of a conservative U.S. "Think Tank"
i. A once-fertile mountain
j. A street in Port-au-Prince where children live
k. St. Jean Bosco church (See history.)
(More than one student can be assigned to each role.)

Students could contact various organizations for policy statements to assist with the preparation of their testimony. (If time is limited time, ask agencies to fax information.) Progressive perspective: contact any of the organizations listed on page 30. Conservative perspective, contact the State Department (Public Information Division, Rm. 5831, US Dept. of State, Washington, DC 20520-6810), or conservative and ultra-conservative think tanks such as: Heritage Foundation (Publications Dept., 214 Massachusetts Ave. NE, Wash., DC 20002, 202-546-4400), the Puebla Institute (1319 18th St. NW, Wash., DC 20036, 202-296-8050), or The Center for Strategic and International Studies (1800 K St., NW, #400, Wash., DC 20006, 202-887-0200).

3. **Racism.** Haiti can be used as an example of how racism has been used to justify foreign policy. Trace the history as follows: (1) Conquest (refer to Columbus' logs), (2) Slave trade, (3) U.S. and French relations with Haiti immediately after the revolution (The United States and France refused to recognize the new government. Why?), (4) United States Occupation of Haiti in the early 1900s (State Department and other government officials made numerous racist statements to justify the invasion and abuse of Haitians), (5) Current Policy: What is the U.S. government's current policy toward Haiti? Is the current policy racist? The government statements are no longer as blatant as they were in the early part of this century. However, Representative Charles Rangel (D-N.Y.) and others argue that the actions speak just as loud as words, and that the treatment of Haitian refugees is a racist policy. What do you think?

4. **Fairness in the Media.** Whose perspective is presented in your newspaper? Many major papers rely primarily on news from the State Department and other

"inside the Beltway" sources or public relations firms. In an effort to "encourage" the press to print their perspective, the *de facto* Haitian government hired the public relations firm *Craig Shirley and Associates* to promote support for them and to discredit Aristide. The Duvalier government did the same thing. They paid Ron Brown (recently nominated as Secretary of Commerce) a retainer of $12,200 a month from October of 1983 to July of 1986 to represent them in the United States.

These public relations firms put a certain "spin" on the news. For example, in the last 6 months, news on Haiti focused almost exclusively on the refugees and what we should "do about them." Rarely was there news about efforts to return the democratically elected President to his post or about the minimal refugee flow while he was in power.

Investigate who funds the major newspapers and press associations. Whose interests do they represent? (Refer to Bagdikian, B. (1991.)*The Media Monopoly.* Beacon Press.)

Study your local press coverage. What slant or "spin" are they taking? Is it fair coverage? If not, organize a letter writing campaign. For documentation on accuracy in the press, refer to the publication *Extra* from Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR, 130 West 25th Street, NY, NY 10001, (212) 633-6700).

5. **Soul in a Bottle:** **a.** What other metaphors could be used for control or repression? **b.** Are there family or social traditions in your neighborhood that are being "kept in a bottle"? Should they be revived or protected? Why or why not?

6. **Black History Month Display on the First Black Republic:** Sometimes the best way to learn is by teaching. Prepare an educational display for the school on Haiti. Since there are typically many stereotypes about Haiti, the information could be shared under headings that begin with the question "Did You Know...?" Try to make the display as interactive and dynamic as possible. Imagine that you were a student from another class walking by, what would grab your attention? What would challenge your assumptions? What would make you want to learn more? What actions are you going to encourage the readers/viewers of the display to take?

7. **Support the Restoration of Democracy in Haiti.** As students and teachers, there are many actions you can take to support the restoration of democracy in Haiti. These include: **a.** Call or write as many senators and representatives as possible, especially those in your area. Urge them to (1) work to restore democracy and democratically elected President Aristide to Haiti, (2) to protect the Haitian refugees who are truly fleeing repression, and (3) to end the source of repression in Haiti.

House/Senate Switchboard 202-224-3121
US House of Reps, Washington, DC 20515
US Senate, Washington, DC 20510
Key Representatives: Lee Hamilton-IN, Charles Rangel-NY, Tony Hall-OH.
Key Senators: Edward Kennedy-MA, Joseph Biden-DE, Christopher Dodd-CT, Kweise Mfume-MD
President: Bill Clinton, White House, Wash, DC 20500

b. Write letters to the editor and editorial pieces about the situation in Haiti. Look for articles to respond to about Haiti or Haitian refugees.

c. Host a speaker or video about Haiti at your school, union or professional association. An excellent video for this purpose is **Killing the Dream.** (See p. 31.)

d. Organize a candlelight vigil in memory of the more than 3,000 Haitians killed since the coup.

e. For more ideas and resources, request an organizing packet from Clergy and Laity Concerned, address below.

Organizations/Journals

Amnesty International, 322 8th Ave., New York, NY 10001. (212) 807-8400. Write for human rights reports.

Center for International Policy, 1755 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20036. (202) 232-3317.

Clergy and Laity Concerned (CALC), 340 Mead Road, Decatur, GA 30030, (404) 377-1983.

Ecumenical Program on Central America and the Caribbean (EPICA) 1470 Irving St., NW Wash, DC 20010. (202) 332-0292.

Global Exchange, 110 Maryland Ave. NE, Washington, DC 20002. (202) 547-2640.

Haitian Enforcement Against Racism, 1396 Flatbush Ave, Brooklyn, NY 11210. (718) 604-3665.

Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, 330 Seventh Ave, NY, NY 10001. (212) 629-6170. Write for reports, such as *Paper Laws, Steel Bayonets: Breakdown of the Rule of Law in Haiti.*

National Coalition for Haitian Refugees, 16 East 42nd Street, 3rd Floor, New York, NY, 10017. (212) 867-0020. Publish *HaitiInsight.* Free subscription.

Pax Christi USA, 348 East 10th St., Erie, PA 16503. (814) 453-4955. *Human rights reports.*

People to People, 414 Summit Ave, St. Louis, Mo. 63119. (314) 961-0316. Organize high school student tours to Haiti.

Quixote Center/Haiti Reborn, PO Box 5206, Hyattsville, MD 20782. (301) 699-0042.

Washington Office on Haiti 110 Maryland Ave. NE, Wash, DC. (202) 543-7095. Write for human rights reports and Urgent Action appeals. News clipping service also available.

Further Reading on Haiti

Due to limited space, we include only a few of the most important titles with which to begin your study of Haiti. Many of these include extensive bibliographies. A longer list of publications and organizations is included in the tabloid, *Haiti: A Look at the Reality* (see non-fiction below under Brescia.)

Fiction

Endore, G. (1991.) *Babouk*. NY: Monthly Review. The slave revolution. Forward by Jamaica Kincaid. **Secondary and adult.**

Roumain, J. (1944.) *Masters of the Dew*. London: Heinemann. A classic novel. **Adult.**

Temple, F. (1992.) *Taste of Salt: A Story of Modern Haiti*. N.Y.: Orchard Books. A compelling story as told by 17-year-old Djo from his hospital bed after being beaten by the Macoutes. Paints a picture of the contemporary life of many young Haitians. $14.95 from Orchard, (800) 672-6672. **High school and adult.**

Wolkstein, D. (1978.) *The Orange Tree and Other Haitian Folktales*. NY: Alfred Knopf. **All ages.**

Non-Fiction

Aristide, J.-B. (1990.) *In the Parish of the Poor*. New York: Orbis Books. **Adult.**

Barry, T.; Wood, B; & Preusch, D. (1984.) *The Other Side of Paradise: Foreign Control in the Caribbean*. N.Y.: Grove Press. **Adult.**

Brescia, S. (Ed.) (1992.) *Haiti: A Look at the Reality*. Tabloid on Haitian history, religion, human rights, refugees, economy, women and development, environment and more. 1-4 copies: $2.50 ea; 5-9: $2 ea; 25-49: $1.25 ea. Call for other bulk rates. Quixote Center, PO Box 5206, Hyattsville, MD 20782, (301) 699-0042. **Adult.**

Courlander, H. (1960.) *The Drum and the Hoe: Life and Lore of the Haitian People*. Berkeley: University of California Press. A comprehensive source of information on Haitian beliefs, folklore, spirituality, dance, songs, games, proverbs, and more. **Adult.**

Donahue, D. & Flowers, N. (1992.) *Haitian Refugees and Human Rights: Activities for the Classroom*. Amnesty International. $2. Amnesty, Educators Network Contact, 53 W. Jackson, Room 1162, Chicago, IL 60604, (312) 427-2060. **Grades 7-12.**

James, C.L.R. (1989.) 2nd ed. *The Black Jacobins*. New York: Random House. This powerful book is the classic account of the Haitian Revolution of 1791-1803. **Adult.**

Golden, R.et.al. (1991.) *Dangerous Memories: Invasion and Resistance Since 1492*. Chicago: Chicago Religious Task Force on Central America. **Secondary and Adult.**

Lawyers Committee for Human Rights. *Haiti: A Human Rights Nightmare*. 330 Seventh Ave, NY, NY 10001. **Adult.**

Métraux, A. (1959.) *Voodoo in Haiti*. N.Y. Schocken Books. An authoritative analysis of vodou by a respected scholar. **Adult.**

Sunshine, C. (1991-92.) *Caribbean Connections: Overview of Regional History; Puerto Rico; Jamaica*. Washington: EPICA/NECA. See below. **Secondary and adult.**

Trouillot, M. (1990.) *Haiti: State Against Nation*. N.Y.: Monthly Review Press. **Adult.**

Wilentz, A. (1989.) *The Rainy Season: Haiti Since Duvalier*. New York: Touchstone/Simon and Schuster. **Adult**

Yoder, C. (Ed.) (1992.) *Faces: Special Issue on Haiti*. NH: Cobblestone. Excellent sections on art and culture. Order for $5.95 from Faces, 30 Grove St, Peterborough, NH 03458. **Grades 4-7.**

Videos (Prices include postage.)

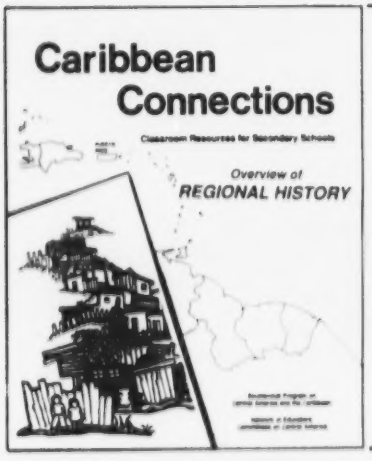
Black Dawn. Award-winning animated film tells the story of Haiti's revolutionary past through the paintings of over a dozen Haitian artists. Available in French, Creole or English. 20 min. VHS + study guide $35.50. Schenkman Books, 118 Main Street, Rochester, VT 05767, (802) 767-3702.

Haiti: Killing the Dream. Powerful documentary on the history and current situation. Interviews with President Aristide, clergy, cross section of Haitian people, military junta, U.S. State Department and more. Ideal for schools. 60 min. $25. Crowing Rooster Productions, PO Box 1944, Canal St Station, NY, NY 10013, (800) 424-0305.

Haitian Pilgrimage. Traces journey of a Haitian-American family from Boston back to their roots in Haiti. Includes glimpses of a Vodou ritual, interviews with President Aristide, and more. Critiques myths about Vodou. 27 min. $27.50. Same distributor as **Black Dawn.**

Kafou: Perspectives from a Small Island. Videos on Haitian history, culture and traditions. Contact DCPS, Channel 48 Attn: Kafou, 1709 3rd St. NE, Washington, DC 20002 (202) 576-7741

Krik?Krak! Tales of a Nightmare. Dramatized story of the ancestral struggle for freedom. 78 min. Call for price. Mountain Top Films, Box 684, 128 E. Broadway, NY, NY, 10002 (212) 226-4093.



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NECA 1118 22nd Street, NW
Washington, DC 20037
A publication of NECA and EPICA.

Sources

Africa World Press, 15 Industry Court, Trenton, NJ 08638. (609) 771-1666.

Haitiana Publications, 221-09 Linden Blvd., Cambria Heights, NY 11411 (718) 523-0175. Wealth of books on Haiti in Creole, French and English. Also textbooks from Haiti in Creole.

Heinemann, 70 Court St. Portsmouth, NH 03801, (603) 431-7894. Request catalogue on African and Caribbean literature.

Monthly Review Press, 155 W 23rd St. NY, NY 10011, (212) 691-2555.

Please note: Many of the organizations on page 30 also provide publications.

Haitian Proverbs

Photo: © 1992 Mev Puleo/ Impact

Sè lè koulèv mouri, ou konn longè li.
Only when the serpent dies
do you know its true length.

Bwa pi wo di li wè, grenn pwenmennen di li wè pase l.
The high tree says he sees far, the walking (traveling) seed says he sees farther.

Yon sèl dwèt pa manje kalalou.
A single finger can't eat okra.

Bèl antèman pa di paradi.
A beautiful burial does not guarantee heaven.

Konstitisyon se papye, bayonèt se fè.
The constitution is made of paper, but the bayonet is made of steel.

Ròch nan dlo pa konnen mizè ròch nan solèy.
Rocks in the water don't know the misery of rocks in the sun.

Sa je pa wè kè pa tounen.
What the eye doesn't see,
doesn't move the heart.

Kay koule tronpe solèy, men li pa tronpe lapli.
The house that leaks can fool the sun,
but it can't fool the rain.

Dèyè mòn gen mòn.
Behind the mountains, more mountains.

These are just a few of the hundreds of Haitian proverbs.

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